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ABSTRACT

The guidebook, designed for professionals and paraprofessionals working with disabled persons in parishes, schools, and institutions, examines issues in religious education with disabled persons. Papers focus on integration of disabled persons into the religious educational community and into the Christian community. S. Hall makes a plea for full integration and participation of disabled persons in "Into the Christian Community." S. Haskett, in "Disabled Persons as Our Sisters and Brothers in the Christian Community," cites church teachings on the subject, and M. Harrington considers issues involved in disabled persons' sharing the sacraments in "Reflections on Disabled Persons' Participation in Sacramental Life." K. Jennings explores approaches for churches and dioceses in "Special Religious Education Programs: Organizational Considerations and Effective Teaching Techniques." Practical suggestions for teachers of mainstreamed students in religious education are provided in "Some Thoughts on Mainstreaming" by B. O'Donnell. Drama, pictures, and music are among the avenues explored by B. Britschgi in "Communicating Jesus to Non-Verbal Developmentally Disabled Persons." Curricular and instructional ideas are provided by B. Britschgi and K. Jennings in "A Formation Program for Volunteer Catechists." Examples of five special religious curricula are given, and a concluding paper by H. McDonald lists resources for parents and teachers. (CL)

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Religious Education
With Disabled Persons

Into the Christian Community

Edited by Suzanne E. Hall, SNDdeN

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

A religious education guidebook for professionals and paraprofessionals working with disabled persons in parishes, schools, and institutions.

National Catholic Educational Association
James Place, 1077 Thirtieth Street, N.W.
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Dedication

This book is dedicated not only to our brothers and sisters who are disabled but also to all groups of people in our world who are being oppressed and kept poor by our insensitivity, our prejudices and our selfishness. If we can allow ourselves to be truly with—*in communion with*—our oppressed, our poor, and our disabled sisters and brothers, we will be touched and hopefully transformed by their simplicity, trust, and uncomplicated caring. Is this transformation not our greatest need in today's competitive, and self-destructing world?

Suzanne Hall
May, 1982

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"Let us be witnesses to the truth that there can be no separate Church for disabled people."
—"Into the Christian Community," by Suzanne E. Hall, SNDdeN

Into the Christian Community

Suzanne E. Hall, SNDdeN

This is a book about people—people who are waiting to be accepted fully into our human community. It is a book about people who have been perceived as different from the rest of us; people who have been labeled handicapped, mentally retarded, sick, or afflicted, and who have thus been kept separated from us, segregated behind institutional walls, or kept at a distance by means of our attitudes and psychological defenses. And, finally, it is a book about why and how these people should be included in our religious educational activities, and integrated into our Christian communities.

In their recent work for the Carnegie Council on Children entitled *The Unexpected Minority*,[1] Gliedman and Roth liken the plight of disabled persons in our society to that of black persons before the civil rights movement of the 1960's. Because of attitudes and prejudices, black persons were denied access to educational, social, and religious activities with the rest of society. To this day, our developmentally disabled brothers and sisters are being denied such access because of our attitudes and prejudices about "disability."

The authors discuss handicap as a social construct, i.e., as a society we have learned to think of and respond to disabled persons in certain ways and to limit our expectations of their abilities to perform both socially and professionally. We have learned to perceive disabled persons within the framework of a medical model. Thus, our immediate reaction upon seeing a disabled person is to feel pity, revulsion, or fear while at the same time expecting that person to remain apart from us because, after all, she or he is sick, different, not whole.

Trinity College, Washington, D.C.

Gliedman and Roth invite us to reflect for a moment on our reactions to an approaching stranger who is limping down the street. Do we feel fear, pity, or possibly even pretend we don't see the person? As the stranger comes close we see that the affected leg is in a cast and the stranger is wearing a jacket with a ski club insignia on it. How differently do we feel about the person after learning that the diasability is only temporary and due to a skiing accident? Do our feelings change significantly? Do we feel a sense of relief? Our initial feelings about the stranger were the result of how society has interpreted the value of disabled persons. Our societal mindset has been that disabled persons are a bit less than fully human and therefore should be segregated from us. This mindset with all its legal, social, and personal implications represents the greatest *handicap* for disabled persons. A person with a disability becomes a *handicapped* person when he or she is faced with society's intolerance for "differences" and for physical or mental imperfections. It is society's response, then, that creates a handicapped person; it is society's negative mindset and level of expectation that *handicap* a disabled person.

Therefore, it is these deeply ingrained learnings, this social construct that we must attempt to change to achieve the ultimate goal of integrating disabled persons into our societal life and into our Christian communities. This goal is synonymous with accepting disabled persons as just that—persons who happen to have a disability. This acceptance will mark a significant change in our perception of and our consequent *handicapping* of this segment of our society. If we truly believe in the innate dignity and value of every human being, and if we expect to be credible proponents of a holistic pro-life effort, then we, as members of the Christian faith community should be at the forefront of this movement to integrate disabled persons into our Church's life.

In their *Pastoral Statement on Handicapped People*, the United States Bishops made the following statement:

> We call upon people of good will to reexamine their attitudes towards their handicapped brothers and sisters and promote their well-being, acting with the sense of justice and the compassion that the Lord so clearly desires. Further, realizing the unique gifts handicapped individuals have to offer the Church, we wish to address the need for their fuller integration into the Christian community and their fuller participation in its life.

Christian community, by its very definition, implies inclusion, caring, support, and non-segregation. The context of our Church life—our parish life—is the obvious natural setting within which to witness true Christian community, i.e., caring and support for *all* regardless of abilities, race, or socioeconomic status. Historically, we as Church have made strides in terms of integrating racial minorities; however, we have not made much progress in the effort to include disabled persons in all facets of our Church's life. We as Church cannot continue either to ignore or to segregate disabled persons.

Our challenge is to include disabled persons in our religious education programs and to integrate them into all facets of our parish life. Hopefully, after reading this book, you will be convinced of the theological imperative to do so, and also, will be aware of some practical ways to begin. Our ultimate goal should be total integration of disabled persons into all activities which comprise our parish life. However, because of the reality of society's present attitudes and prejudices, the first step may be simply to stop denying the existence of disabled persons in the parish and begin some special programs for them. The following chapters in this book will assist in doing this. For those who are already offering some special programs, the next step may be to begin integrating some disabled persons into the regular religion classes and also into the normal, everyday activities of the parish. The concepts and practices set forth in this book may be used or adapted for this purpose.

In the final analysis, the question is, "Do we have the courage and the commitment to stop *handicapping* persons who comprise a significant segment of our Church's population, and begin relating to them as our sisters and brothers who happen to have a disability?" Changing deep-seated attitudes is a long and arduous process. Our bishops have spoken the *words* of integration and full participation in community. Let us now give both ourselves and our children the opportunities to *do the justice* inherent in these words. Let us be witnesses to the truth that *there can be no separate Church for disabled people.*

Suzanne E. Hall, SNDdeN, *is Executive Director of the Special Education Department of the NCEA. She previously served successively as teacher, psychologist, and director at the Lt. Joseph P. Kennedy Institute in Washington, D.C.*

"When we are faced with a disabled person, we are shown the hidden frontiers of human existence, and we are impelled to approach this mystery with respect and love."

—Document of the Holy See for the International Year of Disabled Persons

Disabled Persons as Our Sisters and Brothers in the Christian Community

Sheila Haskett, OSF

Jesus proclaimed his mission as Savior by announcing his concern for and service to persons with handicapping conditions. At that period of human history when Jesus walked among us, the terms "mentally retarded" or "developmentally disabled" had not yet been coined, but even much earlier than this the condition was recognized, and those who had it were frequently ridiculed, even cruelly mistreated.

Still today these persons are typically ignored and excluded from the life of the Church. There are probably more than a million Catholics of all ages in the United States today who are considered developmentally disabled. These individuals have long been objects of the charity of the Church. For centuries Christian belief was the shield that stood between them and destruction or abuse from a society that could find no reason for such persons' being alive at all.

Yet even in the presumably enlightened 20th century the questions are seriously asked, "Why should we teach religion to developmentally disabled children? Of what use is it to them? Why should developmentally disabled adults remain in special programs, make retreats or receive spiritual direction?"

The answer rests, first of all, on the theological premise which Christianity is all about, that the message is universal. No period of history, no group of people is excluded from its influence.

If we really believe that Jesus wishes to make Himself available to every person, then we realize that He accepts people as they really are. Some people are developmentally disabled.

March of Dimes, Birth Defects Foundation

Jesus understands, far better than we, the problems these persons bring to every learning situation, including learning about Him. Jesus still wants to come to them. He still wants them to come to Him. Religious instruction makes this union possible.

Jesus didn't say, "Let the smart little children come to Me. . . ." His invitation was unlimited. He invited all persons, even those with a low I.Q., even those who might be unable to express coherently the love they feel.

The psychologist would provide a second reason for teaching religion to the developmentally disabled. People are like cakes, not cars. The ingredients that make up the human individual are all so fused and integrated that they cannot be isolated, screwed out and replaced like the sparkplugs in a Mustang. Once it's baked, the shortening in the cake and its effect on the other ingredients can never be removed again. The aspects of the human person—body, mind, emotions, soul— are intermingled so thoroughly that we cannot think of them separately. We think of a human being as a human being. Intelligence, or lack of it, is only one aspect of what a person is.

The Christ-event need not be grasped by the intellect alone. Salvation is more than an *idea*. If this is so, and of course it is, then Christianity is attainable, even by those whose ability to take in ideas is limited. Actually, few persons of even superior intelligence approach religion in an entirely intellectual way. The correlation between what is known and what is believed is not a perfect one.

The moralist might object to religious instruction of the developmentally disabled person on the basis of a lack of imputability, an inability to commit sin. This position might be stated as, "Why bother? These people can't sin. Their souls are saved automatically once they're baptized."

Automatic salvation is perhaps a comfortable thought, particularly to the grieving parent who is struggling to accept a child's limitations, but it is not a very logical one. To deny the developmentally disabled person the capability of sinning is to deny that person the ability to make decisions, to choose right from wrong, love from failure to love. Anyon who has lived or worked with these persons knows that this simply is not so. When the 12-year-old Down's Syndrome boy takes a poke at his little sister, then runs out of the room to avoid the wrath of his father, he knows very well what he is doing. He may not be able to gauge accurately the extent of injury inflicted, but he knows that what he has done is wrong.

The developmentally disabled person, even though profoundly handicapped, is capable of selecting some special friends and of

making an affectionate response to friendship offered. While full knowledge and complete understanding may be lacking, certainly enough remains in many cases to justify the conviction that the developmentally disabled person is capable of sinning, and is also capable of growing in love and grace.

"But can the developmentally disabled person really learn religious truths?" the educator might object. Yes, of course. Developmentally disabled persons can learn, because they *have* learned. Recently, a moderately developmentally disabled little girl was receiving instruction on the concept that God's love for her was greater than any human love could ever be. The evaluation at the close of the lesson went like this:

"Who loves you, Denise?"

"My mom and dad."

"Who loves you even more than your mom and dad?"

"My dog."

"But who loves you even more than your mom and dad and your dog?"

"God!"

Denise doesn't have the relationship concepts of "more" and "less" fastened down yet. She couldn't put glasses of milk in the correct sequence of this one has more in it than that one. But she can understand that God loves her. He loves her more than she can explain. Even her teacher claims to understand some things she cannot explain. Who cannot understand beauty? Yet who can explain what it is?

Can the developmentally disabled child really grasp religious truths? The idea of God's care for all creation, a rather basic truth, was once expressed by a developmentally disabled boy in a poem that he wrote about his observations after Wisconsin had become a winter wonderland. He said:

How lovely is the snow that falls
It's so soft it doesn't hurt a thing
When it comes down.
After it is done blowing
The trees and bushes,
Fence posts and telephone poles,
Are covered with soft white.
It makes me think
That God has put His created things to sleep
Under a soft, fine, white blanket of snow.

—Joe

Quite obviously, Joe had internalized an abstract truth and found an application in the world about him.

From a purely pragmatic point of view, religious education can open to developmentally disabled persons some very precious treasures. Their typically low self-concept with its pervasively depressing effect on achievement in many areas of their lives can be uplifted by the knowledge that in the eyes of God, who is very important, very powerful, very everything desirable, they are persons of worth and value. They know that they are special to God, that they can *be* pleasing to him, that they can *do* things that will please him. And they feel better about themselves because of this knowledge.

Developmentally disabled persons, then, become more fully aware of their personhood as they face the challenges which make them grow, confident that they are capable of succeeding. Religious instruction can give them that confidence.

Religious instruction can also provide a developmentally disabled individual with the guidelines for becoming the kind of person whom other people like to have around. The employee who diligently returns an hour's work for an hour's pay, who respects the property and equipment of his or her employer, who obeys directions, replies and reports truthfully, is welcome on the job.

The co-worker who speaks well of others, does not quarrel or fight, gets along better than the individual who does not live by these precepts. The developmentally disabled person whose life is dominated by moral principles is one, then, who is likely to be more acceptable, more employable, more secure in the realm of interpersonal relations as well as in the world of work.

Professional workers who are concerned with the vocational training and job placement of handicapped individuals overwhelmingly support the thesis that the personal characteristics of their clients are far more important than their technical skills when it comes to holding a job and getting along in the community. Religious instruction can develop those personal qualities that gain for developmentally disabled individuals the acceptance and respect they desperately need.

Why should we teach religion to developmentally disabled children? Of what use is it to them? These children should receive the good news of Christ because:

1) He wants them to. God accepts them as they are and loves them as they are, even when they are developmentally disabled.

2) Mental development is not necessarily proportionate to

spiritual capacity, and Christianity can be grasped even by those with limited intellectual powers.

3) Though complete understanding may be lacking, most developmentally disabled children are capable of knowing good and bad, of making choices. They can fail in love and they can grow in love, and they need instruction to help shape their decisions.

4) They should be taught what they are capable of learning; they have proved repeatedly that they can learn religious truths.

5) They need to have feelings of self-worth to free them to utilize the capabilities they have: they need clear guidelines for their relationships with others.

Learned theologians the developmentally disabled will never become—as will few of the rest of us—but their understanding that religion is something you do something about has been demonstrated frequently. Almost any pastoral worker who has followed the progress of developmentally disabled young adults can tell stories of successful employment, sensible handling of personal affairs, of lives lived for others in a way that makes a critical difference. And in all these achievements, the spiritual life and church membership with its consequent support have contributed substantially.

Abbe Bissonnier, who teaches developmentally disabled children in Paris, sums up the answer to the question, "Special religious education—what's the point?" in this way:

> Let such children approach the Lord...and let us not be among those who try to keep them from Him. Let us believe in their worth, in their reason for being. Let us know, in one word, how to love them as God Himself loves them, He who has His reasons for allowing their life, for maintaining their presence amongst us, on our earth and in His Church, of which they are also members.

Possibly the question of why religious instruction should be presented to developmentally disabled persons should not even be asked at all. Perhaps this question is but one more expression of disrespect for their often-violated human dignity. If the universal need for any child, for any person, to come to a deeper relationship with God and with other people is acknowledged; and if the humanity of the developmentally disabled person is acknowledged, then it must

follow that the developmentally disabled person has spiritual needs, just as other people do. These needs may differ in degree because of the limitations of the person in whom they reside, but they do not differ basically in kind.

There is a distinct tendency on the part of those who write about, or design programs for, developmentally disabled individuals to consider them as a kind of monolithic group, all having certain common characteristics. This is a grave fallacy. As a group there are more differences among developmentally disabled individuals than there are between them and their normal peers in comparable socio-economic situations.

They are said to be hyperactive and passive, having short attention spans and being very persistent, hostile and loving, obstreperous and quiet, disobedient and docile, beautiful and grotesque. Following an exhaustive review of research on the personality of developmentally disabled persons, Heber (1964) concluded that there was scant evidence to validate characteristics which would universally describe them.

Many of the ideas held by the general public about developmentally disabled persons are no more than stereotypes or caricatures based on superstitions or casual experiences. In actual fact they are neither delinquent nor deviates, nor are they appealing, holy innocents. They are, rather, a group of very diverse, very unique individuals. The degree of handicap, the person's family, and whether or not he or she has been institutionalized are very significant factors in determining the kind of personality an individual will have and the future to which each person can look forward.

Interestingly, while research scientists have failed to find data to support many of the negative characteristics attributed to developmentally disabled individuals, there is a fairly strong consensus on the part of those whose lives are bound up in their service regarding the positive traits of those "whom the hand of God has touched," as the Irish express it.

Paulhus and Mesny (1968), for example, state:

> The "poor" children of humanity, those to whom all too often one throws "crumbs from the table" draw us out of the impasse. They oblige us to bring about a total conversion of our mentality. They bring to a humble reality those who think that humanity has never known in the course of its history such profound disorders as those it sees in modern times...
>
> Exceptional children stand guard against too hurried an

appreciation of events. They unerringly distinguish between what is essential and what is accidental. They are this Rock which remains in the midst of the whirlpools. All whose lives are touched by them are enabled to live, by means of them, the aspiration that God gave to all living flesh, to become a "spiritual body." More particularly children of Good Friday they are, as much as other Christians, children of Christmas and Easter.

Jean Vanier, who has lived with developmentally disabled men in a small village near Paris, speaks eloquently and frequently of the spiritual precociousness of his friends:

> A mentally retarded person can lead a deeply sensitive life, a life of the heart, which tends to draw him into close relationships with other persons and by which he can be protected, guided and encouraged along the path of human and spiritual progress. (Quoted by Mosteller,1972.)

In reviewing what these various persons are saying, it becomes clear that developmentally disabled persons enoble in many ways the lives of those who are concerned about them. At a recent symposium, Jean Vanier responded to the question, "Why should we care?" by stating that in expressing this concern we ourselves become more fully a person.

The role of developmentally disabled persons in bringing love into the world was described by Buck and Zarfoss (1965):

> Here ends our little book, upon the powerful theme of human love, the all-pervading spirit which alone makes tolerable this existence upon a globe imprisoned in time and space. We are here, we human beings, we know not how or why. We are here and we are gone. In the brief span only love can serve, and we propose that the retarded child provides an essential means toward universal love.
>
> For the unit in any community is the family, and when the family of a retarded child receives him as a special gift, heartbreaking, yes, and at first crushing, but special and calling for special understanding and special love, that family becomes a focal point of leadership in the community, the parents leading the children in the atmosphere of love, and the family leading other families in the atmosphere of love, until the whole community is the better for the experience.
>
> Love enlarges the heart so that what is done for one small

retarded child will have its rippling repercussions in benefits for other damaged children and handicapped persons, and thus warmth and mercy and justice for the one and the few will extend to all.

The family is the unit of the community, the community is the unit of the nation, and the nation is the unit in the world of human society. It is not too much to say that what one family does with and for its retarded child in time may change the world.

Although developmentally disabled persons have been variously regarded as a "surplus population," "punishment from God," "a drain on the tax-payer," as well as "the bearers of gifts," their contribution to the fulfillment of personhood of those whose lives touch theirs had generally been overlooked.

Parents of a developmentally disabled child have spoken of the dimensions this child has put into their lives and those of their other children. "We *needed* Joe," one mother said of her developmentally disabled son. "My husband and I had been all wound up in things that didn't matter until he came along. We were very selfish, I guess. I know we're better persons because of him."

By "better persons," this mother went on to explain, she meant that her child had somehow broken the restraints that kept her from loving, from sharing their home and their time, from listening—not only to him, but to her husband, her other children, the poor, those in need of her concern.

The needs of the developmentally disabled person often satisfy in others the need to be needed, the need to give of oneself. Special religious education can be one means of satisfying this mutual need—the need of the teacher for self-giving, the need of the developmentally disabled person to be prepared for a closer relationship with God.

One final point must be considered. It is necessary to respect the developmentally disabled person before he or she can be helped. Carder (1972) at an international seminar related the story of the Canadian Indians who refused to leave their reservations to integrate into the mainstream of society. She drew the analogy between their situation and that of the developmentally disabled person.

She quoted a certain chief as saying, "Do you know what it is like to feel that you are of no value to society...to know that people come to help you, but not to work *with* you because they believe you have nothing to offer?...You hold out your hand and beckon me to come

and integrate. How can I come with any dignity? I shall not come as an object of your pity. I shall come in dignity, or I shall not come at all."

Belief in this inherent dignity of the developmentally disabled person must precede any attempts for service, or the service is but a veiled insult.

A few years ago a distinguished body of scientists, administrators and educators in the field of special education listened in shocked disbelief at an international symposium when a well-reputed professor stood to present his paper. In contrast to the lofty pronouncements of his colleagues of abstract statistical data and their implications for yet more research, this man began a quiet recital of his professional life.

He began teaching developmentally disabled children, he said, because he lacked the self-confidence to teach the bright ones. His doctoral dissertation merely contributed to the store of myths about the education of developmentally disabled children. Later research projects were also clouded with contrived data and faulty procedures.

Then his beloved child was struck with a physical condition that resulted in brain injury. He who had preached acceptance to other parents could not accept. He began to question his commitment to, and his concern and love for, developmentally disabled children.

At last he came to the painful conclusion, "I think perhaps I have come to love mental retardation more and retarded children less." He went on to warn his listeners that "we must build a profession in which we will not understand the retarded less, but ourselves more." From this self-examination will come understanding, and the freedom to love without demeaning.

One cannot think, "I love these retarded persons because I must think for them; I can take care of them." This patronizing attitude is not love at all, but a mockery of the persons and their handicaps. "Do-gooders" can do no good for developmentally disabled persons. It is essential to appear before them humble in the knowledge of one's own handicaps of the heart, one's own deficiencies.

Vanier (1969), in a televised interview, commented that if a teacher or a parent always wants to give and never stops to listen, never stops to receive, there can be no real communion. Love must be a communion. It must be a receiving as well as a giving. There must be an awareness of the wonderful gifts that the handicapped individual can give.

We must recognize and humbly receive these gifts before we can say we truly love developmentally disabled persons. The greatest

gift that one can give to such persons is the opportunity for them to give to others. We must be able to say "thank you" before we can truly say "I love you."

In the following pages consideration will be given to the "how-to's" of providing for the spiritual nurture of persons with developmental disabilities, and to the major issues currently facing workers in the field of special religious education. Because there is no *one right way*, various viewpoints, all valid, will be expressed.

No matter which approach is taken, or what program model is followed, it is important to remember that the handicapped person is a member of a family and his or her condition has many ramifications in the lives of other family members. Each must be included in the planning. However, as is true in all planning of human services, the people being planned for must be given the opportunity to express what their needs really are—not what they theoretically ought to be—and they should be encouraged to help one another to meet these needs. No help helps like self-help. This approach may lead to a less efficient program, but efficiency is not the main objective of the Special Religious Education program. The growth of a faith-community is. It is more important that people leave the session feeling good about their contribution to it than that everything should run smoothly.

While there are many differences of opinion regarding what should be done or taught, and how this can best be accomplished, there is no question that Jesus wishes his people to be served and to be included in the mainstream of Church activities. Especially in more recent times, one pope after another has made repeated declarations affirming the value and the rights of disabled persons. The United States bishops recently issued a powerful pastoral letter on the importance they attach to concern and action on behalf of disabled persons. They state in part:

> Concern for handicapped people was one of the prominent notes of Jesus' earthly ministry. When asked by John's disciples, "Are you he who is to come or do we look for another?", Jesus responded with words recalling the prophecies of Isaiah: "Go back and report to John what you hear and see; the blind recover their sight, cripples walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear, dead men are raised to life, and the poor have the good news preached to them." (Matthew 11:3-5) Handicapped persons become witnesses for Christ, his healing of their bodies a sign of the spiritual healing he brought to all people.

By every means possible, therefore, the Church must continue to expand its healing ministry to these persons, helping them when necessary, working with them, and raising its voice with them and with all members of society who are their advocates. Jesus revealed by his actions that service to and with people in need is a privilege and an opportunity as well as a duty. When we extend our healing hands to others, we are healed ourselves.

If handicapped people are to become equal partners in the Christian community, injustices must be eliminated, and ignorance and apathy replaced by increased sensitivity and warm acceptance. The leaders and the general membership of the Church must educate themselves to appreciate fully the contribution handicapped people can make to the Church's spiritual life. Handicapped individuals bring with them a special insight into the meaning of life, for they live, more than the rest of us perhaps, in the shadow of the cross. And out of their experience they forge virtues like courage, patience, perseverance, compassion, and sensitivity that should serve as an inspiration to all Christians.

In a recent statement on the International Year of Disabled Persons, proclaimed by the United Nations, Pope John Paul II delineated principles to be used as guidelines in dealing with disabled persons, which, in summary, point out the need to recognize the human dignity of special persons, their need for help in taking their rightful place in society, their need for integration, normalization and personalization. The Pope comments:

> A disabled person, with the limitations and sufferings that he or she suffers in body and faculties, emphasizes the mystery of the human being....We are shown the hidden frontiers of human existence and we are impelled to approach this mystery with respect and love....The quality of a society and civilization are measured by the respect shown to the weakest of its members.

Officially, then, from the Pope and the bishops, there is strong support for developmentally disabled persons. On a practical, day-to-day basis, however, this support may at times seem a bit remote. It is then that only faith in the promises of Jesus, and the conviction that this special ministry is truly a privilege, can sustain us in the struggle.

There must be loving identification between the religious educator or pastoral minister and those persons being ministered to. A person—parent, sibling, handicapped individual—with a problem needs to be met with understanding first as a person, then as a person having a problem, never as a problem itself. It is bearable to *have* a problem, not to *be* one!

When one begins to feel from the inside out the anguish, the limitations, the discouragement, the humiliations, that developmental disability imposes on affected individuals and their families, one is beginning to be ready to render real service. The language one uses in referring to a person and the handicapping condition can be very thoughtlessly wounding, or it can be healing and reassuring if it expresses affection and respect, sympathy but never pity.

With Jesus as our model, we consider one by one the problems that need to be solved, the steps that need to be taken. Jesus was first a listener, patiently waiting for the expression of the problem as the sufferer saw it, the request that the sufferer needed to make. Then, with gentleness, with no probing questions and with no implications that a favor was being bestowed and thanks were in order, the peace and healing were given. From this basic pattern we can proceed to minister with our developmentally disabled brothers and sisters, giving what we have to offer and receiving in turn *their* gifts with joyful love.

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"...a human being possesses a unique dignity and an independent value, from the moment of conception and in every stage of development, whatever his or her physical condition."
—Document of the Holy See for the International Year of Disabled Persons

Reflections on Disabled Persons' Participation in Our Sacramental Life

Mary Therese Harrington, SH

When a family member or a pastoral worker invites a developmentally disabled[1] person to celebrate a sacrament of the Church, it usually indicates that the disabled person is taken seriously and that the sacrament is highly valued. However, between the first moment of insight that such a celebration may be possible and the actual celebration, there will be more than the usual factors to be considered, discussed and decided upon.

Since the Sacraments of Initiation are those most often celebrated with developmentally disabled people, most of this chapter will focus on them.

General Pastoral Setting

It is worthwhile looking at the context in which the developmentally disabled person is growing in faith. The most normal setting is the Christian family. Normally the faith of the family carries its disabled members and supports them on the path of the sacraments. An active Christian family can nourish the disabled member in faith, unconsciously by its very life, and consciously when the members become aware that everyone can grow in faith. But, just because a family is active in its participation in the life of the

Church, it does not follow that the developmentally disabled member is. There are many mentally retarded Catholic adults who do not go to church, or if they go, have never been to Communion. In the past someone may have said that "the person will go to heaven anyway," or "they cannot go to Communion because they cannot say their prayers by heart." The situation needs to be examined.

If the person lives in a group home, a residential facility or in a large institution, it is worthwhile remembering that the freedom and the opportunity to practice one's religion is a human right. Many times the spiritual development of a person is totally neglected because of the religious preferences of the staff or the administrators. This is not just, and advocates for the person are right to call attention to the neglect that is allowed.

Both the family and the facility need to allow the disabled person to belong to larger groups of practicing Christians. Small communities of faith that welcome disabled members take many shapes and forms: the parish, catechumenate groups, catechetical groups, prayer groups, retreat groups, etc. Where people gather together in faith, Jesus is present; grace is given and received. The basic sacrament, then, is the sacrament of the Church, experienced in communities of faith.

When a developmentally disabled person is a permanent and active member of a community of faith, the celebration of sacraments is logical, relatively simple, and uncomplicated. The group can answer the basic question; i.e., can this person grow in faith, can this person develop spiritually. The person is secure because of the group experience. The group is secure because it has watched a person develop a sense of the sacred, a sense of Jesus Christ, a sense of the Church, a sense of the Father.

Decisions For or Against Sacramental Celebrations

It is important to be aware of who requests or proposes a sacrament and why. Oftentimes a family member or a catechist proposes the sacrament. It is usually clear that the developmentally disabled person is in harmony with the proposal. However, more than one celebration hastily put together has fizzled as the person refused to go along with the ceremony. A sacrament cannot be planned all around the person without taking the person into account. If the person is to participate in the sacrament, creative ways have to be found to engage the person, even the severely and profoundly disabled person.

When there is desire on the part of the person for sacramental participation, it is often prudent to proceed with plans and decisions.

Given the problems a person may have with projecting self into the future, it is difficult to sustain desire too long. To delay the celebration of a sacrament for reasons extrinsic to the sacrament (until Grandma comes from Alaska, etc.) does not make good sense.

When the invitation is made to the disabled person to celebrate a sacrament, there are criteria being used, consciously or unconsciously. When the invitation is denied a disabled person, criteria are also being consciously or unconsciously used.

One principle to be used is that the criteria should have some intrinsic connection with the significance of the sacrament. Developmentally disabled people have not been admitted to the Sacrament of the Eucharist for the following reasons:

"You do not need it to go to heaven."

"You do not know your prayers."

"You have not reached the age of reason."

"You cannot tell mortal from venial sin."

"You cannot even talk."

"You cannot know what you are doing."

"You cannot go to Confession first."

"We do not give Communion to an animal."

The Sacrament of Penance, on the contrary, has been imposed with the following remarks:

"You are a bad girl/boy."

"The devil is in you."

"You are full of evil."

The Sacrament of Confirmation has been avoided with the following observations:

"You cannot manage a service project."

"You cannot make it through a ceremony with 500 others to be confirmed."

"You are only a passive, not an active member of the Church."

"You do not need Confirmation anyway."

Developmentally disabled people have been pushed into a sacramental celebration for the following reasons:

"Your brothers and sisters all went to Communion by the time they were eight years old and so will you."

"Your brother is going to be confirmed this year (or receive Communion) so you will too."

"Everyone in this parish goes to Confession before First Communion."

"There are too many people in this institution for me to figure out who is Catholic. Any one who comes to Communion or is pushed up by the staff, receives."

If the criteria are to have something to do with the significance of the sacrament, it may be helpful to look at some of the sacraments briefly. It may be helpful to ask what human experience the sacrament is connected with, what catechetical experiences may be appropriate, and also to look at the celebration itself. Then maybe the criteria that do not touch the significance of the event can be left aside.

First Communion is an event cherished by most practicing families. What is the human experience to look at to see if the quality of the event is open to its sacramental dimension? Eating and drinking are the human experiences basic to the sacrament; not just eating and drinking any which way, but in a ritual manner with others. Those who live with severely disabled people are aware that meal time can be the supreme challenge of the day. How the family copes, how the disabled person copes with eating and drinking together gives the symbolic dimension, a pre-requisite for the sacramental dimension. So many eating disorders are significant in a person's progress toward Communion. It is important to get in touch with these before plastering on superficial phrases about the Sacrament which can be mouthed to satisfy everyone but the person involved.

One begins the discernment about a person's readiness for Communion by sharing food together. In an institutional setting, where the process of eating can be sub-human, the catechetical progression has to build toward developing dining skills. In a home where the disabled person is fed alone, the catechetical progression has to build toward developing social skills surrounding the sharing of food. And even if a person comes from a family setting where the family meal is open to its symbolic meaning, the person needs time to learn to share food with the larger community of faith.

As food and drink are shared in a situation that has elements of ritual present, one can begin to talk about sharing the special food, the Sacred Bread, Jesus, the Sacred Wine, Jesus.

A person needs to develop a sense of the sacred before the mystery of the sacrament is accessible. In a sacrament, one becomes aware of a mystery at work through signs seen and felt, as well as through words spoken or signed. If a developmentally disabled person is limited in his or her intellectual functioning, it is difficult to explain a sacrament. One enters into a celebration experience that awakens faith through intuitive awareness. Because all life is sacramental, a liturgical catechesis for disabled people is more involved with structuring a progression of celebrations, where the sacred dimensions of all life are sensed, than in lectures about the sacra-

ments. One fosters participatory knowing, aware that abstract and highly conceptual knowledge is out of reach because of the disabilities involved.

As the catechetical progression advances, one must observe a person closely to see signs of growth, especially if the person is nonverbal. Yet, finally, it is not so hard to detect signs of reverence: the expression in the eyes, the posture of the body, the position of the hands, the quality of the sounds if there is no speech, the quality of movements.

So, if a person can share food and drink in a ritual setting, can be reverent, attentive, silent, aware of others, one can begin to look for signs of desire. If the person attends Eucharistic celebrations, there will be some curiosity at the time of Communion. That is the time to stimulate and awaken desire.

When a person can relate to others with love and desires to be at one with them in the act of Communion, there is readiness, there is meaning. The mystery at work in Communion is that of the strengthening of our relationships with one another, with the Lord Jesus, with the Father. One looks for a developing sense of the sacred, a sense of the mystery of the Church, a sense of the presence of Jesus.

It has happened often enough to be significant, that a mentally retarded person does much better talking about Communion after he or she has received the sacrament than before. Because it is hard to project self into the future and talk about what has not yet happened, verbal content before Communion can be weak, even though desire may be strong. After a person starts going to Communion, and continues in the community of faith, the witness that is given can be outstanding.

Confirmation is very close to Baptism in its original significance. Baptism marks the entry of a person into the People of God. But when one looks at a developmentally disabled person who is marginalized by virtue of a disability, one has to question the significance of the *experience* of belonging to the People of God.

The disabled person is not going to be as obvious as others in active service to the Christian community as a preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation. That does not negate the profound movements awakened by the sacramental progression, of belonging and giving witness as inspired by the Holy Spirit.

It is often a real risk for a marginalized person to enter a community of faith and really agree to belong, to get close to people on an affective level. Egocentricity may in fact be an instinct for survival and self-protection. But in a community this self-imposed dis-

tance has to give way little by little, if one is to belong. This progression can be dramatic, and indicate that a real conversion is unfolding.

When one asks at what point another person is ready for Confirmation, it is worthwhile to remember that the basic sacrament is that of the Church, experienced in the here and now as a community of faith. When a person has agreed to belong, and starts to manifest the fruits of the Holy Spirit in that community, it is appropriate to celebrate the growth taking place by a public ceremony. Confirmation is one moment in the on-going life of belonging to the People of God.

During a celebration of Confirmation it becomes clear to what extent a disabled person can give witness to the whole assembly. Often those who love and are concerned about this person can fill a whole church. Everyone has had to struggle to foster life and well-being with the person. When that person is presented by the assembly to the Bishop or his representative, joy is tangible. There may be many places where this disabled person will never "belong," but he or she is a full member of the People of God and will always belong in the House of God.

Although the Sacrament of Penance is often celebrated before First Communion, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to maintain this sequence with developmentally disabled people. The reason is that a person who has been wounded in his or her development may be able to enter into Communion as a mystery before he or she has a developed sense of self implied by the Sacrament of Penance. The Sacrament of Penance, however, is not to be neglected, as it can be very meaningful to those who so often feel out of harmony with others and themselves.

Unfortunately, developmentally disabled people can too often sense alienation as part of their very existence. So often they seem to cause trouble to everyone, no matter where they go, no matter what they do or do not do. Too often the disabled person has to struggle to learn to forgive as well as to ask to be forgiven. Bitterness can eat away at one's very soul.

The family of the disabled person often needs to participate in the orientation toward the celebration of this sacrament. As one mother put it, "I want to celebrate with him. I want to ask pardon for all the times I have been violently angry because of him. I should like him to forgive me too."

The human experiences that this sacrament deals with are basically being sorry for a real wrong, being able to accept forgiveness, and being able to forgive others. When the family and the commun-

ity can come together to celebrate the forgiveness of a loving Father, it is a significant moment.

In many places, general absolution is used (as it would be in a nursing home, etc.), when there are a number of developmentally disabled persons together.. Often because of language problems and a vague sense of alienation, the precision required in a face-to-face situation is beyond the capacity of those present. Yet all can enter into the pardon offered in Jesus Christ.

Naturally, those who have developed the language and the sense of self required for the confession of sin in a face-to-face situation are to be prepared in an appropriate manner.

A word of caution is in order for those children who have behavior disorders due to sensory-motor problems, or those who have an overlay of emotional disturbance in addition to their developmental disability. It can happen that moral judgments are made by others about behavior that is part of the child's disability. In other words, the child has a very difficult time coping, and the adult puts moral values on the behaviors. The child can try to punish himself by going to the harshest confessor, attributing more evil to herself than fits reality; or the adult can push the child to confession when the child really does not grasp what is going on. Harsh parents whose anxiety is excessive can use the sacrament as a form of child abuse. When the punitive aspect of the sacrament looms out of proportion for the child, catechetical re-education is in order, and, one may add, very difficult. Unfortunately, these problems are not ancient history.

It is also worth noting that if the Sacrament of Penance is to be celebrated with a non-verbal person, respect is required. Communication is distinct from verbal language. Even if a person cannot utter a word, he or she may be able to communicate. It takes time to build a relationship so that the communication has a chance of being somewhat accurate. It may not be at all helpful to the child to have the parents say all the things they perceive the child to have done wrong. One cannot march a child through confession—with the parents saying the "sins"—before First Communion, just because one sacrament is supposed to come before the other, no matter what this experience does to the child. On the contrary, the Sacrament of Penance is a beautiful sacrament of forgiveness, to be celebrated with thankfulness and peace.

When a developmentally disabled person becomes seriously sick, the Sacrament of the Sick is appropriate. The Sacrament is not appropriate just because there is a permanent and chronic disability. Nor is the Sacrament of the Sick a replacement for Confirmation or

Communion because the pastoral workers are not creative enough to figure out how to go about orienting a person to the proper sacrament. The Sacrament of the Sick is for sick people. A disability, even a severe disability, is not a sickness. The struggle over the past forty years in the United States has been to try to remove the disabled person from the medical model of care, which treats a disabled person as a sick person. Church members do not help the situation by treating a disabled person as sick. A disability will not be cured; it will always be there.

When the developmentally disabled person is really sick, an effort is to be made to help the person to be aware of the mystery of Jesus' care and the healing offered through the signs of the oil, the gestures and words, the presence of the priest and of the community of faith. A narrow reading of the *Introduction to the Sacrament* can be misleading. In Numbers 12 and 14, the "use of reason" is used. (The *Rites of the Catholic Church*. New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1976, p.585) Reason can be interpreted in a narrow sense, which would connect it with abstract intellectual functioning. This may be precisely where the disability of a person may manifest itself. But there are other forms of intellectual functioning, symbolic and intuitive, which if any person is sufficiently sick,are common to most people. Because a person is mentally retarded, it does not mean that she or he does not have a form of reasoning. This may be global, not precise; concrete, not abstract; symbolic, not analytic. It may be closer to the co-naturality of Thomas Aquinas. What is important is that the person knows by participating in the action and probably not apart from it to any significant degree. The knowledge one has may be more participatory than theoretical. This does not deny that there is a very real pastoral problem if the person is hallucinating, but this is different from mental retardation when it comes to the celebration of the Sacrament of the Sick.

If the disabled person is about to die, Viaticum is to be offered with the community of faith present if possible. In some institutions, the process of dying can be impersonal. Also, in some institutions, the fact of death is covered up for a host of reasons, none of which makes sense to the community of faith, if the person belonged to one. If an institution persists in ignoring the religious dimensions of the death of its residents, Christians have to take a position that demands respect.

At one time, a chaplain would claim the body of a Christian for burial if the person were a ward of the state. Since chaplains are becoming rare in facilities for developmentally disabled persons, the Christian community has to work out some arrangement to be faith-

ful to one who has shared in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ through the Sacraments of Initiation. A Christian burial is not a luxury, but part of our mutual commitment to one another as baptized members of Christ. No matter how damaged the body may be, it is still the temple of the Holy Spirit. No matter how undervalued the person may have been in the facility, if he or she belonged to a community of faith, there would have been love offered and received. It is incomprehensible, then, to have the community systematically kept away from the funeral service of a ward of the state to protect the anonymity characteristic of ages past.

It is very difficult for other members living in an institution if a loved friend just disappears and someone drops the word casually that he or she is dead. The mystery of death is one we all will pass through to come to eternal life. Those disabled persons who by their disability live in the shadow of the cross need to hear the Good News: Jesus died and lives; we die, but we shall live.

For the Sacraments of Matrimony and Holy Orders, the general norms of the Church apply. Of course, the disability of the person is to be taken into account in the orientation of a person toward a life vocation. A steady and well thought out preparation is preferable to hasty decisions that are apt to lead to regret. However, one does not need to apply norms more severely to disabled persons than to the rest of the human population.

It is normal for a Christian community to be concerned about the development of its members in the areas of affectivity and sexuality. A well thought out study of the moral questions involved can be found in "Guidelines for the Treatment of the Mentally Retarded" by Richard McCormick, S.J. (*Catholic Mind*, November, 1981, pp. 44-51.)

The Celebration of a Sacrament

When one intends to celebrate a sacrament with developmentally disabled people, it is important to realize that the quality of the celebration carries significance. Often the persons who are disabled cannot of themselves sort out what is *supposed* to happen. They can enter wholeheartedly into what *is* happening. They cannot generate much religious meaning related to the sacrament alone and apart from the experience.

The burden then falls on the leaders of the community that the celebration be coherent. The celebration has to be very well prepared so that everyone is free to be present to the mystery dimension of the event and not tied up by the mechanics of who is to do

what, when and how. Some of the elements common to celebrations are as follows:

Place. The church is the most obvious place for the celebration of the sacraments. However, the environment deserves attention in relation to the disabilities involved. Some elements are obvious: accommodations for wheelchairs, assistance for those who may be visually impaired or hearing impaired, space for children who may be hyperactive and cannot tolerate pews, etc. Other elements are not so obvious, such as the need for a withdrawn child to be close to the action if there is going to be participation, the need to take time at the beginning to allow a child to get oriented in space if there are sensory disorders or if there is severe mental retardation.

The space will speak to the person, so it is worthwhile working on it. There needs to be a clear, uncluttered focal point, first of all, so that the person knows where to direct attention. The lighting is to highlight the focal point but not stimulate the hyperactive person. Beautiful objects, vestments, flowers, incense, speak to the value placed on the event.

When the celebration takes place outside the church, care needs to be taken so that the place be clean and well prepared. In an institution where space is usually wanting, the administration hopefully can be drawn into the dialogue essential to preparing a celebration. If the administration is not in a position to enter into the preparation required to meet the religious needs of the residents, then the community of faith just has to cheer up and show up with brooms, dust pans, mops, vases, flowers, candles, incense, rugs, record player and records (not forgetting extension cords) vestments, books, table, table coverings, refreshments for afterward, plates, cups, napkins and silverware. The chairs need to be prepared for the correct number. The various ministers need to know where to go, where to sit, when to move. The people need to know where to go and what to do. Someone had better have the plan clearly in mind and be able to orient people to the space to be used, otherwise the celebrant will be left with five jobs to do at once. This is not fair to him, nor to the assembly.

If the celebration is to be in a family home, then the same care for cleanliness and order is to be insisted upon. If need be the members of the community of faith can come the day before to help with preparations. The family may be just worn out from the work involved with caring for the person. The celebration of a sacrament is a social event and even if it is at home, the larger Christian community is called on to be present in some way.

Music. One of the key elements in a celebration is the quality of music to be used. For some strange reason, it is often thought that if the participants are mentally retarded, silly music may be used. Mentally retarded people deserve to be taken seriously in their sacramental celebrations. The music used can support the development of a sense of the sacred which is essential for the ambiance surrounding a sacramental event.

Pace. If the environment is well prepared and if everyone is comfortable and secure, silence *is* possible, even with hyperactive children. Silence can be invited at moments when the assembly is ready to pray. It cannot be demanded only as a discipline. If it is, for sure someone will start to weep or wail. Discipline is required most of all of the ministers. Their responsibility is to project a sense of order, and to set the pace for the assembly. The pace to be used is *the* art form necessary to integrate developmentally disabled people into a sacramental celebration. The adults can be deliberate in their pace if they know just where things are and what to do when. If they are ill at ease, the assembly will pick it up like lightning and the celebration can fall into disarray.

There is no use trying to hurry a celebration with developmentally disabled people. The ministers might just as well relax. Besides the pace required for a spirit of prayer, the pace of the people will require time for communication, time for movement, time for what is happening to be absorbed.

The words used have to be addressed to the people involved. Those speaking have to take time to look at those present. A celebrant who looks as though he is more interested in the liturgical books than the people, or the reader not secure enough to look up from the text, may find trouble when they do look up. Also, there are times when the vocabulary needs to be adjusted, gestures used, facial and vocal expression used. In sum, one has to be present to the assembly to help it to be present to the mystery unfolding.

A celebrant needs a team to plan with, pray with, laugh and cry with if he has to lead an assembly with a significant number of developmentally disabled people. A celebrant does not dare show up at the last minute for a celebration with such an assembly. He needs to get a clear notion of who is present, the range of disabilities and the pace possible for the group. He needs to be secure with the other ministers. And, when the leaders are assailed with the nagging question, "Does it make any difference anyway?" "Do they really know what is going on?" let them remember that even profoundly retarded people know if they are loved.

Balance. In the celebration of the sacraments there is a need to look at the balance required among the parts of the ceremony. What if some parts are too long or too short in relation to the whole? If one part is too long, fatigue will set in, boredom will be catching, the assembly will become cranky. If another part is too short, the assembly may miss the event as it flies by. Balance is a criterion for the music used. Besides the length to be considered, there is also musical style. If a piece is too loud and hectic, some persons will simply suffer from sensory overload and either literally scream or drop out. If the music lacks color and is dull, no one will pay any attention to it.

After a celebration, it is worthwhile to ask about the quality of presence manifested in the assembly. Were the members aware? Were they able to follow? Were the cues given them appropriate (or did someone hand out song sheets to mentally retarded people who cannot read?) Did the musicians use songs that all could join in on at the time of the refrain? Was the Eucharistic Prayer accessible, given the vocabulary of the assembly? (See the *Eucharistic Prayer for Children.*) Above all, was the ceremony experienced as prayerful?

Although the Christian community has to make some adjustments to celebrate with developmentally disabled members, it is an honor to celebrate with those who cannot and will not hide behind masks. What is, is. When they pray, they pray. When they celebrate, they celebrate. When a parish can integrate its disabled members into its celebrations, everyone benefits.

Selected Excerpts from Pastoral Statements Regarding the Reception of Sacraments.

All People Together

In January of 1981, the Roman Catholic Bishops of England and Wales issued a pastoral statement for the International Year of Disabled People entitled *All People Together.* In this statement the Bishops include sections (15 through 25) on the sacramental life of disabled persons. They are as follows:

15—Through the sacrament of Baptism disabled persons are members of the church. As a consequence they are encouraged to share in the full sacramental life of the church if this be at all possible. Those whose task it is to administer sacraments must be eager to ensure that a physical or mental disability does not lead to a spiritual deprivation. Priests and

teachers must be sensitive to the intuitive interpretations of parents and others who are close to disabled people and who can sense their mood.

The whole emphasis of the church's attitude must be one of welcome and supportive encouragement. Care must be taken to ensure that the things of God are not misused, but it is equally important to ensure that what God offers to his children is made available to them. Certainly no priest should refuse a disabled person any sacrament without making sure that he appreciates what the disability is and how it is to be interpreted.

16—Especially is this true of the mentally handicapped child. The sounds and emotions of the child may mean nothing to a stranger or to a priest inexperienced in these matters. But a parent, who is the child's first teacher, a specialist teacher, can be attuned to the child and know that appreciation, even reverence is being expressed in signs which may be unusual, but are genuine and adequate. A mentally handicapped person usually relates intensely to those immediately present—parents, brothers and sisters. This quality of relationship can develop and extend to others to whom the parents relate. A handicapped child can grow to relate to Christ because the parents explicitly do so. Intuition can bypass the usual reasoning processes and develop a prayer life and an appreciation of sacrament which is not expressed in words and can only be detected by a parent deeply in tune with one who relates in this unusual but genuine style. Pope Paul VI in his address on *"The Pastoral Care of Handicapped and Maladjusted Youth"* in October, 1973, said that communication includes "One's simple presence, by a look, silence or appropriate language."

17—Confirmation establishes us as witnesses to the world. The part each member of the church plays will be conditioned by the circumstances in which people live. The disabled person is giving a serious witness to the paradox of Christianity. This bitter sweet theme is essential to the Gospel message and given clear prominence by the Christian person who is disabled. This was supremely displayed by Christ himself who died that we might live and suffered that we might have happiness.

Because the disabled person can arouse the generosity of so many other people there is an involved presence in the community which should be sealed with the Sacrament of Confirmation. The ability to bring together people of many faiths, and of none, is an outstanding apostolate. The reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation by disabled people is more than a kindly gesture—it is a recognition of the active mission which is so effectively theirs.

18—Disabled people must be made welcome in the liturgical life of the church, especially at Mass where the community of the faithful gather. Within this is the sacrament of Holy Communion—the supreme sign of unity with Christ and his church. Into this holy unity is gathered the unity of parents with their handicapped child and the unity within the family is consecrated when the family come together to receive Our Lord in the Eucharist. Because the sacrament is so sacred it must never be diminished or reduced by mindless reception and a child of normal mental ability is expected to have an explicit faith in the real presence before receiving Holy Communion.

19—But the mentally handicapped child may be incapable of being so explicit. Such a child is already a child of God by faith and Baptism and all such are invited "To come together to praise God in the midst of his church, to take part in the sacrifice and to eat the Lord's Supper" (*Vatican II. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, n.10*). If the church is insensitive to the variety of human situations there is created a "double disability," a limitation of understanding on the part of the church which adds an unnecessary frustration to that which already exists. Approaching the time when it is the practice to receive Holy Communion, the mentally handicapped child may not be able to formulate distinctions which are usually required before admission to the sacrament. The priest whose task it is to administer the sacrament must make sure that he has used every possible means to interpret the mind of the child and, in addition, be encouraged by the faith of the family of which the child is almost certainly the center. When parents are devout and generous the community of the family supports the child in faith. We already see this in the baptism of children.

Pope Paul VI asked: "How can she (the church) contribute to the integration of the handicapped into modern society, if she does not endeavour to have them recognized as full members of her own?" (*Pastoral Care of Handicapped & Maladjusted Youth: October, 1973*).

20—For a physically handicapped person the sacrament of Reconciliation can be distressing rather than encouraging. The physical effort of entering a confessional, the inevitable revealing of one's identity, the limitation of communication: these are examples of what can be an embarrassment and frustration rather than a moment of welcome and reunion. Sorrow must be present, but in cases of extreme speech limitation this may have to be expressed other than by words. This is the traditional sensitivity for which the church has always called.

21—The person with a severe mental handicap is in need of particular understanding. While some may be too limited to understand this sacrament, by the same token it can be presumed that they are too lacking in conscious decision to be in need of the sacrament. On the other hand, a restricted experience of their condition may cause a priest to misread the situation. Parents and others who have been closely associated with the mentally handicapped testify to the sense of right and wrong which can develop. The automatic labelling of the mentally handicapped as incapable of wilful fault does not fit the facts. There is frequently an intuitive ability to understand wrong and a sorrow which can be recognized in the explicit joy which may follow forgiveness. Mentally handicapped people are not just innocent children: they may become adults and capable of guilt.

The priest may find difficulty in recognizing signs which the parent can interpret very clearly. Neat expressions to describe facts are beyond the capability of many disabled people and the task of priests and parents together may be to express for them what is already in them. Signs, gestures and facial expressions can reveal an adequate disposition for reception of this sacrament.

22—The disabled person needs to love and be loved. The disabled person needs to feel lovable. This basic need—basic to all human people created by God who himself is love—is

expressed in many ways: within family life, by a generous and trusting friendship and, in a unique way, between husband and wife in marriage. For some people a mental or physical handicap will exclude the possibility of such a relationship. But this must not be presumed. On the contrary, the natural right to marry must be respected unless the person concerned is clearly either unable to understand what they are doing or unable to sustain a life-long commitment of marriage.

23—Within the group—the very large group—of people we call disabled there are many persons who are very suited for married life. The limited research done on the stability of marriage between disabled people suggests that there is better prospect of a permanent commitment between people who marry while disabled than between people who have no apparent handicap. Because of this, support should be given to those who, although in some way disabled, show a serious desire to marry and are able to make a life-long commitment. Serious consideration would have to be given to the implication of having children and caring for them. However, we must recognize the right of handicapped persons to enter marriage and the witness they can give to the beauty of married love.

24—Because the understanding of disability has been limited and even distorted in the past, there has been a hesitancy on the part of society to allow disabled people to take an active and official role in the community. More recently there has been a positive policy of allocating essential work to such people. Initial expectations have not altogether been fulfilled, but the message is clear. The church must be prepared to accept and use to the full a disabled person who is called to the "priesthood and religious life." Certain disabilities will always exclude such a possibility and the ultimate decision must rest with the bishop. But a growing appreciation of individual potential must change attitudes. The ideal is for full integration wherever this is possible. The many ministries of the church can be enriched by the involvement of those people of God who are so obviously close to the sufferings of Christ. Especially can one who is disabled be an effective minister to one who is equally limited and in need of understanding.

25—The total attitude of the church to handicapped people must be encouraging. If they are baptised they are members of the church and those who administer the sacraments on behalf of the whole people of God must look for the best way for disabled people to enjoy full sacramental life if this be at all possible.

Break Down the Barriers

Also in 1981, the Archbishop of Perth, Western Australia, Most Reverend Sir Launcelot Goody, K.B.E., issued a Pastoral Statement of Concern called *Break Down the Barriers.* At the end of the Statement there is a section on sacramental issues entitled "Diocesan Guidelines for Reception of the Sacraments by the Intellectually Handicapped." That section follows below:

Once parents have acknowledged that their child is intellectually handicapped and express their desire for the child to receive Confirmation and Holy Communion then the usual norms governing these matters should be replaced or supplemented by consideration of the faith of the family in the love that the Lord has for their intellectually handicapped member.

In practice, if a child gives no evidence of intellectual activity these Sacraments may still be given so long as the child is accompanied by other members of the family.

One important reason for making this decision is to give witness to the love of Christ and the Church for the child who is apparently intellectually inactive but is a person with an eternal destiny and priceless dignity. Once the question of giving these Sacraments to such a child has been raised, were the Church to respond negatively the family would very likely experience a rejection by the Church of one whom they have been taught not to reject but to accept and love. A positive response would tend to encourage them and would bring to life the Gospel scene of Jesus putting his arms around little children and blessing them. (Mark 10: 13-16).

It may be desirable on some occasions, when administering Holy Communion, for the priest or acolyte to give the Host to one of the parents who can then give it to the child to make sure that the child is not upset by a stranger and that the Host is swallowed. This procedure would have the added advantage of expressing family love and unity.

Every effort should be made to help any child who can appreciate these Sacraments to do so. Appreciation will vary, of course, according to the extent to which the child is handicapped. In the case of Holy Communion special catechetical kits are now available and a few people are willing and able to give personal help to make the reception of the Eucharist as fruitful as possible. This work is of great value.

In the case of Confirmation, if it seems desirable for a priest to confer this Sacrament he will need to apply for permission on each occasion in accord with the general rules.

Consideration should be given in the reception of these Sacraments, to all the circumstances affecting each case and even each occasion. For instance, any appearance of the Sacraments being forced on a child should be avoided. Nor should parents consider themselves obliged to bring a child to receive Holy Communion every time that they do so themselves.

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References

1. *Developmental Disability.* A developmental disability originates before age 18, continues indefinitely and constitutes a substantial handicap. It is not a mental illness nor other type of illness. Most aspects of life are affected and the person needs to learn to live with the disability. Developmentally disabled refers to those who have a lifetime condition of mental retardation, cerebral palsy, epilepsy and autism.

Mental Retardation. There are about 6 million mentally retarded people in the United States. About 80% of retardation has socio-environmental not biomedical causes. About 90% of retarded persons are mildly retarded and are able to care for themselves. Moderately retarded persons are able to care for themselves but usually need a sheltered work environment. Severely retarded persons have defects in motor development, speech and language, and often have physical handicaps. They are not completely dependent. Profoundly retarded persons often have physical handicaps, and their severe impairment in coordination and sensory development makes it necessary to have constant care.

Epilepsy. There are about 4 million persons with epilepsy in the United States. There is no precise answer as to why brain cells discharge abnormally. Grand mal seizures last a minute or more and can occur one or more times daily, weekly, monthly or annually. Petit mal can last from 5 to 20 seconds and be accompanied by a momentary lapse of consciousness. Psychomotor seizures can occur at any age and last from a minute to several hours. Epilepsy in itself usually does not affect a person's intelligence.

Cerebral Palsy. There are about 750,000 persons with cerebral palsy in the United States. Any damage to the brain tissue can cause cerebral palsy although a chief cause is insufficient oxygen reaching the fetal or newborn brain. In cerebral palsy there is difficulty in muscular control and coordination. There may be complications such as seizures, the inability to see, hear, speak. It is not always associated with mental retardation.

Autism. There are about 100,000 persons with autism is the United States. The causes are not known. The universal symptom is that the child is unable to relate to other persons in a normal way. Some children with autism improve with persistent care.

See Publication no. 76-29002, Developmental Disabilities, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Developmental Disabilities Office, Washington, D.C. 20201.

2. *All People Together*, order from CSP Studios, St. Mary of the Angels, Moorhouse Road, London W2 5DJ England.

3. *Break Down the Barriers*, order from Catholic Committee for I.Y.D.P. c/o Catholic Social Welfare Commission, 23 Victoria Square, Perth, West Australia 6000.

"...realizing the unique gifts handicapped individuals have to offer the Church, we wish to address the need for their fuller integration into the Christian community and their fuller participation in its life."

–Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Handicapped People

Special Religious Education Programs: Organizational Considerations and Effective Teaching Techniques

Kathryn Jennings, OSB

National Apostolate With Mentally Retarded Persons

In November, 1978, the Catholic Bishops of the United States after reflecting on the need of evangelization and exploring the question of the "unchurched," issued the *Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Handicapped People.* The bishops acknowledged the Church's failure in the past to fully incorporate people with handicaps into the life of the Church. Many people with handicaps, especially those who were developmentally disabled, were seen as somehow apart from the rest of us, not having the same needs to grow in the life of grace and in the community. Baptism was considered essential for people who were developmentally disabled, and Eucharist might be permitted. That was all that was thought necessary to assure heaven for them. The need to learn how to live in the spirit of God, to choose light and life, to cope with being "different," wasn't considered except by a few. In viewing persons who are developmentally disabled as "eter-

nal children" or "holy innocents" we have marginalized them, denying them a place in the community with full access to the goods of the community—a share in fellowship, in celebration, in religious education, and in opportunities to serve others with their own gifts. The bishops have challenged the Church to work "for a deeper understanding of both the pain and potential" of our members who have a handicap, and "to expand the Church's healing ministry to these people." (*Pastoral Statement*)

Our bishops have stated: "Catechesis for handicapped individuals must be geared in content and method to their particular situation. Specialized catechesis should help them interpret the meaning of their lives and should give witness to Christ's presence in the local community in ways they can understand and appreciate." In the *National Catechetical Directory*, the bishops go into more detail in outlining an approach to specialized catechesis.

Using both the *Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Handicapped People* and the *National Catechetical Directory*, I will explore ways that a parish or diocese may begin a special religious education program for people who are developmentally disabled. There are five areas that need to be considered at either the parish or diocesan level as we initiate special religious education. They include awareness, assessment, catechist formation, programs, and celebration.

Awareness

"The parish is the door to participation for handicapped individuals, and it is the responsibility of the pastor and lay leaders to make sure the door is always open..." (*Pastoral Statement*) In initiating special religious education, we need the support of the priests and leaders of our parishes so that they may assist us in our task of educating the community.

Hearing about the religious needs of people who are developmentally disabled will be new for many. We never thought too much about the religious needs of these people because we just didn't think about people who were developmentally disabled much. But in the last ten years, legislation involving least restrictive environment, free public education, and deinstitutionalization have brought people who are developmentally disabled into our communities, our schools, and our parishes. As we have grown in awareness of the social and educational needs of people who are developmentally disabled, we are now coming to realize that they also share with all people a need for, and a way of living and responding to God.

The loving response to a loving Father becomes possible as we hear the Word, and see it lived by those who surround us. But how will a person hear the Word, unless someone is sent to share it? Many people who are developmentally disabled have never heard the Good News. Our task, and that of the whole community, is to explore ways to make the Word available to them also.

In beginning this process, certain premises are essential: 1) God loves and accepts us as we are; 2) mental development is not proportionate to spiritual capacity; 3) people who are developmentally disabled can make choices; they can grow in love and they can fail in love; 4) they need instruction and support to help shape their decisions; 5) they should be taught what they are capable of learning; and 6) they need feelings of self-worth and acceptance in order to realize their own capabilities.

As we educate the parish leaders to the religious needs of developmentally disabled parish members, it is important to lead them also to an appreciation of the gifts these parishioners bring to the community. The community must not sell itself short by limiting those who can bring it life.

The National Apostolate with Mentally Retarded Persons has developed a slide-tape presentation, "Special to God—Special to Us," based on the *Bishops' Pastoral Statement.* It is helpful in educating parish councils and other groups in a parish to the needs of persons with handicaps and how to make the *Pastoral Statement* dynamic in our local parish.

Awareness of people who are developmentally disabled—their needs and their gifts—will grow as we continue in our joy and enthusiasm. Others in our parishes will be excited about the possibility of giving to and receiving from people who are developmentally disabled. In that exchange, community will be strengthened.

Assessment

"If the participation of handicapped persons and their families is to be real and meaningful, the parish must prepare itself to receive them. The preparation might begin with a census aimed at identifying parishioners and those with no church affiliation who have significant disabilities." (*Pastoral Statement*)

Once a parish acknowledges its responsibility to begin a special religious education program, the next step is to locate the children and youth who could benefit from such a program.

One initial approach is to research the number and size of special education classes, sheltered workshops, group homes and institu-

tions in the area. The results of this study will give an indication of the need. But the numbers alone don't reveal who the people are, the degree of handicap, and whether or not the person could benefit from regular religious education. That information calls for more personal contact.

It is important to check with the pastor to get the names of families who have a daughter or son who is developmentally disabled and invite them to share their needs and hopes for special religious education. Every family seems to know a few others, and word spreads that special programs are beginning.

The parish bulletin is an effective means for seeking out our special students. An example might be as follows:

"In order that we as a parish may better meet the religious education needs of our children and youth who are developmentally disabled, please fill in the bottom portion and place in the collection basket.

Name _____ Age _____

Address _____ Phone _____

Type of Handicap _____

Person filling out form:
Parent Self Other

The local Association for Retarded Citizens, as well as other special groups, will also allow announcements regarding special religious education to be printed in their newsletters.

As an awareness of the special programs grows, the children and youth needing special religious education will come forward. It is not uncommon to begin a class with three students and at the end of the first year to have twenty, and more with each passing year.

During the initial stages of seeking out our students with handicaps, it is essential to become acquainted with diocesan programs and policies regarding special religious education as well as regular religious education. The special programs should incorporate as many of the elements of the regular programs, and be as like them as it is possible without diminishing the aspects needed to serve the special needs of the students.

The bishops caution us "that great care should be taken to avoid further isolation of handicapped people through these programs." (*National Catechetical Directory*) The tension between specialization and integration is real. Some of our children can be integrated into the regular program with some allowance made for their particular

disability. Others may be integrated with some adaptation in materials. But others may need to be in a small group, or even have their own teacher, because their learning style, attention span, and previous religious experience is so unique. It is this latter group that we are considering here.

Assessment, like awareness, is ongoing. Periodically the parish might re-run the survey in the bulletin, and make announcements from the pulpit about the special classes. When the parish conducts its census, the persons involved might share with families the special services available in the parish and note special needs that are shared or that they observe. One thing is certain, every person has the right to hear the Word spoken so they may be able to respond in their own way. It is a responsibility and privilege to lead others to this response, and we must continually search out those who are unable to participate in regular programs and provide for them.

Catechist Formation

In beginning special religious education programs we need to find catechists and offer them the courses needed to communicate the Word effectively. "Those involved in special catechetical programs should receive the training needed to perform their particular duties." (*National Catechetical Directory*) There are many sources of volunteers—local high schools and colleges, and youth groups. In addition to these, there are parishioners who would welcome the opportunity to teach in special religious education.

For groups that are sources of catechists, it is important to get on their agendas and present the program, the needs, and the contribution that the catechists may make.

The catechist can be a very important person to help the handicapped person feel a sense of belonging. But a "warm body" is not enough. The catechists need skills and sensitivities to share Jesus with disabled persons, and a catechist formation program is essential. This training may be pre-service or in-service. It really depends on which would best suit the program. A catechist formation program may include sessions on 1) psychological and religious development; 2) lesson planning, curriculum, and teaching techniques; 3) sacramental preparation; and 4) liturgy and prayer. Most dioceses have a 45-60 hour basic catechist course. Some divide that into 25 hours basic and 25 hours specialization. The specialization areas include aspects of special education.

Getting the word out calls for a parish bulletin announcement such as the following:

Want to share your faith with our children and adults who are mentally retarded? Catechist formation is being offered at _____ for six consecutive Mondays beginning September 24, from 7:00 pm to 10:00 pm. We need YOU! For further information call _____

If there is a diocesan consultant for special education, then the training is probably coordinated through that office. If there is no diocesan resource person, then the organizer of the parish special religious education may need to seek out diocesan and community resource personnel to address the area of special catechist formation. Further ideas on a catechist formation program are included in another chapter of this book.

Program

"The goal of special religious education is to present Christ's love and teaching to each handicapped person in as full and rich a manner as he or she can assimmilate." (*National Catechetical Directory*)

To achieve this goal challenges the ingenuity and commitment of the community and especially of the catechists. In the beginning the program, consideration must be given to the place, the curriculum, and the use of our time together.

The setting of our classes is important. For whether it is a classroom, a parish center or an empty room, for the time that we are there it needs to become a holy place, a place where we can pray, talk about Jesus and his Good News and celebrate with one another. Usually the place where we meet needs some help to become this holy place, so we engage in furniture moving and redecorating to create the environment. Space is important, with distractions at a minimum. A prayer table with a bible, a candle, and flowers may serve as the focal point for our time together to share prayer with the group. The place for the lesson can be in another place in the room, using desks or tables and chairs.

The curriculum we use is individualized so that the mysteries which constitute the content of belief for the Christian community are taught at the level and in the manner that is understandable to the developmentally disabled child. What are these mysteries? God is our Father, who sent Jesus to show us how to love one another. Jesus shares himself with us in the Eucharist. Jesus died and came back to life again. Prayer, sacraments, liturgy are all seen within this context.

There are some resources that are written specifically for developmentally disabled children and youth and there are others which

are easily adapted. Whatever curriculum you choose for your program will still need to be adapted for your students, for each one brings his or her own unique learning style, attention span and religious experience. You may want to consider any curriculum and its adaptation from the following points: Is it individualized? Is it sequential? Does it utilize the senses? Is it practical?

Preparation for our teaching requires prayer, reflection, and time. Look over the lesson, think through the material to select the one clear idea you want the child to take with him or her. Is that one clear idea important in your own faith journey? Of what significance will it be for your student?

The lesson may be approached in the following four steps: 1) Readiness—what must the child know or be able to do in order to grasp the concept I'm teaching? 2) Motivation—what will I do to make the student want to learn this lesson? 3) Presentation—how will I explain the lesson, what methods will I use? 4) Comprehension— how will I determine if the child understood the lesson?

This approach is part of the *Journey With Jesus* model (Haskett, Cardinal Stritch College, Milwaukee) but it is good pedagogy that should be used no matter which curriculum we choose.

Preparation completed, room in order, and teaching materials ready, it is time to welcome our students. As the children arrive we usually begin with a welcome and some songs, allowing about fifteen minutes to share the events of the past week, and gradually lead into a prayer which becomes the introduction to the week's lesson. Then the students move to their lesson place with their teacher. Some children are in small groups—two or three—and others have their own teacher. The lesson lasts about fifteen minutes, with ten more minutes for an activity to reinforce the concept taught. This may take the form of drama, art, a puppet show, a letter, a walk outdoors. Then the whole group assembles again at the prayer table where each shares what he or she learned and did during the lesson. A prayer is offered by each member of the community thanking, loving, seeking God's help for the week ahead.

The parents meet the catechists for a few minutes at the end of class to talk about the child's lesson and how they may continue the lesson during the week. The whole program lasts one hour, but the activities and movement from one place to another breaks the hour into fifteen minute segments.

In sharing Jesus with our developmentally disabled children all of the things stated before are important—place, time, curriculum, and of course preparation. But the most important is the catechist. The catechist needs to focus on the essentials of faith, to perceive

the depth in the simple, to be sensitive to the symbols that will teach and awaken faith in the disabled person. Yet without any teaching aids or lesson plan we teach about Jesus and his love from the moment we meet our student. We are an incarnation. The joy, the enthusiasm, the love we have teaches immediately that the child is good. Our openness to receive from our students reaffirms them in their own giftedness. We must surely believe in our students so that they may believe in themselves. And in everything we must be gentle and have a sense of humor, for being Christian is a joyful way of life.

Jean Vanier sums up the role of the catechist in this way: "There will not be, and cannot be, any transmission of the spirit, any transmission of the world of love and knowledge of Jesus Christ unless we are living this to the full, to a plentitude, because you cannot fool handicapped people."

The unity for which Jesus prayed will become more imminent as we reach out in love and respect to our brothers and sisters who are disabled and receive back from them a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Celebration

Just as catechesis for persons who have developmental disabilities requires some special adaptations, we must also adapt the ways in which we celebrate liturgy. We must be sensitive to the special needs of these persons and make those changes which encourage meaningful participation. "Masses (and all other sacramental celebrations for handicapped people) require special adaptation. Many mentally retarded persons respond profoundly to concrete visual symbol and gesture. Their liturgical celebrations should use color, art, and music, with less emphasis on verbal expressions of faith." (*National Catechetical Directory*, #138)

Our celebration should be clear and simple and personal; no less personal than Jesus was as he shared with, loved, and touched those people to whom he brought the message of his Father's love. In the expression of our faces, our hands, and our whole bodies we should reflect the love and joy that we feel in the message of love that we share.

Some notable features of adapted liturgy are: processions, music and gesture, simplified scripture, and dialogue homilies.

Processions

"The processional entrance of the children or adult with the priest may help them to experience a sense of the communion that

is thus constituted. The participation of at least some children in the procession with the book of gospels makes clear the presence of Christ who announces His word to the people." (*Directory for Masses with Children*, #34)

Entrance processions allow for more participation in the liturgy. The children may bring in a banner which was made in class and which depicts the theme of the Mass. Two children carry candles on either side of the cross bearer, and another brings in the lectionary. The reverence and the symbols communicate a sense of the holy to all participating. After the lectionary is placed on the lectern, and the candles are placed on either side, the children take their places in the sanctuary.

During the offertory procession the candle bearers join the celebrant in receiving the gifts. At this time the altar is prepared for the Eucharist. Altar cloth, flowers, linens are brought up in procession, and the table is set. Then the gifts of bread, and chalice, and wine and water are brought up and given to the priest. The candle bearers place the candles on the altar and the liturgy of the Eucharist begins.

Music and Gesture

"Singing is of great importance in all celebrations, but it is to be especially encouraged in every way for Masses celebrated with children." (*Directory for Masses with Children*, #30)

Music and singing are important in helping to create a real sense of joy and celebration. We need to choose songs artfully to suit the theme of the celebration and also the people who are celebrating.

Melodies and words must be simple to invite and encourage fuller participation. If there is repetition of a simple refrain, then people can participate more easily.

Whenever possible, gestures should accompany our songs. Because many persons with developmental disabilities are speech impaired, combining gesture with song gives meaning to the words. Natural gestures such as clapping, shaking hands, and holding hands can easily fit the meaning of a word or phrase in a song text.

Simplified Scripture

"If three or even two readings on Sunday or weekdays can be understood by children only with difficulty, it is permissible to read two or only one of them, but the reading of the gospel should never be omitted." (*Directory for Masses with Children*, #42)

Using only the gospel at Mass makes it possible to focus on one lesson and draw out the children's response to that good news.

In simplifying the scriptures great care should be taken that the meaning of the texts is intact. There are several lectionaries for children, as well as gospel readings prepared specifically for celebrations with developmentally disabled persons.

Dialogue Homily

"Sometimes the homily for children should become a dialogue with them, unless it is preferred that they should listen in silence." (*Directory for Masses with Children*, #48)

The active participation of the children in the homily makes it a time of teaching. It draws the participants into the lesson and makes the word alive. As the children are led by the homilist to reflect on the who and when and why of the gospel story, they can be brought to the realization that each of us can be like Jesus in our own life. Making the message personal, and responding in thanksgiving and conversion, is after all the goal of teaching.

Opportunities for Faith-Sharing

There are other celebrations and other components of catechesis we need to make available to people with developmental disabilities. "We all struggle with life. As we carry on this struggle in a spirit of mutual love, we build a community of interdependent people and discover the kingdon of God in our midst." (*Pastoral Statement*)

Prayer groups can come together regularly to share prayer and companionship. These groups should be composed of disabled and non-disabled people. The prayer meetings consist of a time of prayer, scripture reading and discussion, activity, and sharing a meal or refreshments.

Retreats for people with disabilities allow them the time and leisure to deepen their relationship with God and grow in faith.

People with disabilities need to be invited to existing parish programs and organizations so that they may experience Christian community.

Sharing of Gifts

Finally, developmentally disabled people need to serve the community. "When we think of handicapped people in relation to ministry, we tend automatically to think of doing something for them. We do not reflect that they can do something with and for us." (*Pastoral Statement*)

Developmentally disabled persons can serve the parish communities as acolytes, ushers, members of the choir, etc. Each person (and

that includes persons with disabilities) has a unique contribution to make to the community. The gifts are as varied and as numerous as those who possess them.

People who are developmentally disabled serve as prophets in our midst calling us to become gentler, kinder, warmer. They remind us that love matters more than time, more than achievement, more than self.

Kathryn Jennings, OSB, *is Director of Services for Disabled People, Catholic Community Services, Diocese of San Diego.*

"Prejudice starts with the simple perception of difference, whether that difference is physical or psychological. Down through the ages, people have tended to interpret these differences in crude moral terms."

–Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Handicapped People

Some Thoughts on Mainstreaming

Brigid O'Donnell

REACTIONS TO MAINSTREAMING

What comes to mind when you think of the word "mainstreaming?" If you're a volunteer or a professional, more than likely you have a strong reaction, positive or negative.

If your reaction is positive, please read on. The following pages may reinforce what you already know or what you've experienced.

If you reacted negatively, don't skip this section of the book! Mainstreaming can be an enriching experience rather than a frustrating one. What follows may help you overcome your skepticism, or help you look at a past situation from a different perspective.

You may be afraid that if you begin to look at mainstreaming your special religious education class may dwindle. That's very possible, depending on the youth and adults you serve. But there will always be youth and adults who are disabled who cannot be mainstreamed and will need specialized programs. The important thing is to provide the *best* catechesis for each person, whatever form that may take.

You may be saying, "We've tried mainstreaming in the past, and it doesn't work." That may be true, but it's also true that many children needing *some* specialized instruction have simply been dumped into regular religious education classes and have either dropped out or simply become passive (or aggressive) participants because they can't comprehend the material. Read some of the suggestions in this chapter before you send mainstreaming to an early grave.

A common reaction to the word "mainstreaming" is "I don't know." By the end of this chapter you should be able to change that phrase to "Perhaps I'll try."

WHAT IT IS AND ISN'T

Mainstreaming is:
—meeting individual needs of persons who are disabled;
—providing special help when necessary (e.g. sign language);
—having special materials or devices to assist learning (e.g. books in large print or Braille);
—using teacher aids in the learning environment to help individuals;
—having the youth who is disabled do as much as possible with youth in the regular religious education class;
—finding the least restrictive environment in which a person can learn about and experience God;
—enabling students to interact with a person who is disabled;
—recognizing that in the People of God *all* are called to learn, to form community, to worship, to be of service.

Mainstreaming is not:
—placing a person who is disabled in a regular religious education class with no additional help and expecting him or her to feel comfortable and to learn;
—focusing all the attention on the person who is disabled so that others in the class feel resentment or cannot learn at their pace and level of understanding;
—allowing the person who is disabled to dominate the learning situation;
—expecting everything to go smoothly each time you meet;
—asking an inexperienced volunteer to take a person who is disabled into his or her class;
—having the same expectation level for all students in the class;
—undertaking the challenge without involving parents and professionals who work with the disabled person.

LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

The key phrase for you to remember is *least restrictive environment.* It may seem like a big term, but actually it's very simple. Given any person who is disabled, the following questions need to be asked:
—*Where* can he or she learn best?

—*How* can that learning best happen?
—With *What* resources can it be done?
—By *Whom* and with *Whom* can it be accomplished?

This could be a checklist as you work with any individual. It may be someone in a special education class whom you think could be mainstreamed, or it may be someone in a regular class who seems to need something more. The answers to the questions will be different for each class, and it will take time and some combined efforts before you make any decisions. The next section of this chapter will give you some more guides to help your decision-making process. But first, let's look at some situations. Using the guide questions and drawing upon your own situation, decide what is the least restrictive environment for the following youngsters.

Keith

Keith is blind, is ten years old, and has been enrolled in the special religious education class for three years. He is articulate and reads Braille well. His one-on-one learning experiences have helped him to prepare for both Eucharist and Reconciliation. Now he seems bored with the program which serves children who are mentally retarded.

Angie

Angie is fifteen and mildly mentally retarded. She goes to special classes in the high school but joins the other kids for home economics, physical education, and band. Her family just moved to your parish, and her parents are inquiring about religious education. Angie was in a special education class in her other parish and has received the Eucharist but not Reconciliation or Confirmation.

Tom

Tom is a fifth grader. He never seems to follow what's going on in your religious education class. He's having some problems in school and at home too, you discover. His parents have him tested and discover he has a hearing loss in both ears. They wonder if he should join your special education class or stay in the fifth grade. He has average intelligence.

Emily

Emily is five years old and has Down's Syndrome. Her mother wants to enroll her in a religious education class. She wonders if Emily should be in the special education class or in the pre-school program.

There are many more situations that could be illustrated, but just these four indicate that the decisions aren't clear-cut. So much depends upon the individual and the resources that are available. But it should be apparent that the answer isn't always "join the special education program!" The next section will give you more suggestions of what to consider in mainstreaming.

HOW DOES ONE DECIDE?

In addition to the where, how, with what, when, by whom and with whom, there are other indicators for or against mainstreaming.

Degree of Disability

Persons who are slow learners or mildly mentally retarded are likely candidates for mainstreaming. So too are persons who are hearing impaired or deaf but who can read lips fairly well, persons who are blind or visually impaired, persons who are mobility impaired or who have cerebral palsy. This does not mean that they *should* be mainstreamed, because degree of disability is not the only factor.

Persons who are moderately to profoundly mentally retarded, persons who use sign language or those with severe emotional disturbance may be less likely to be mainstreamed, though partial mainstreaming, which will be discussed later, is possible.

Age of Person

A young child who is mentally retarded is more easily mainstreamed with his or her peers than one who is older. Tasks are not complex and much of the learning experience is not "head-oriented." A teenager who is retarded may have a more difficult time entering a high school class on sexuality, for example, but also does not belong with the second graders, which is where his or her cognitive ability lies.

Size of Person

Size relates somewhat to age. You know how out of place a tall twelve year old would feel with eight year olds, but if the twelve year old were quite small, it might work. Again, size isn't the only criterion and must be considered with all the other factors.

Parents' Desires

Since parents are the primary educators of their children, they

have the ultimate responsibility for how their children learn. They also spend the most time with their children and should be aware of the best situation in which they can learn. This does not mean, however, that parents are infallible or that they may not choose what is more convenient for them rather than what their children need.

Always have a conference with parents and carefully consider their feelings and opinions before making your own decision.

School Situation

If a child is mainstreamed in the public school, that may be a good indicator for looking into mainstreaming him or her in religious education. The extent of mainstreaming needs to be considered.

The child's homeroom teacher in public school is a *must* as a reference before making any moves in the religious education program. The teacher, plus teachers of the classes in which the child is mainstreamed, will provide valuable insights into what to expect of the child as well as specific skills or teaching tips that work. These professionals have far more contact and expertise in working with this student, and usually are more than willing to talk with a volunteer teacher. Don't start from scratch when you may be able to avoid misunderstandings and frustration with some extra knowledge.

Volunteer Teacher

The inexperienced volunteer is not the person to choose if you want to mainstream a special education student. Such a person has enough to do without adding someone who needs special help.

The experienced volunteer need not have a special education background (though that could be useful), but should have a sense of integrity and confidence in his or her teaching ability. The volunteer should always be consulted before placing a special education child in the class. The teacher should also have as much information as possible about the student, in order to integrate the child as best as possible.

Depending upon the level, a teacher aide may be needed for the best mainstreaming to happen.

The Other Students

More than likely the other children will know that the special education student has a disability. They may go to the same school, or the disability may be noticeable to everyone. The rule of thumb is to make all students feel as comfortable as possible. Depending on

the age of the student, you may want to spend some class time talking about disabilities in general; all of us are disabled in some way. You may want to ask for specific help from the students for those who are disabled. Or you may want to allow the special education student to be part of the class with as little attention as possible.

Be sure that the presence of the special student does not severely deter the spontaneity or progress of the other students. If behavior or the learning adaptations prove to be detrimental to the class, the situation needs to be reassessed.

The Student

In the midst of the process, don't lose sight of the child. How does he or she feel about being mainstreamed? What are this child's expectations of self, others in the class, and the teacher?

Will it be detrimental for this child to be at the bottom of the class and perhaps frustrated—or will this be the extra challenge he or she needs? Would it be better for this person to be in a special education class and therefore have a chance to be at the "top" and perhaps assist others who are disabled?

The answers are different for each child and each situation. The most important thing is to use your common sense and intuition along with the data you have.

PARTIAL MAINSTREAMING

So far the discussion has focused on total mainstreaming in a religious education program. There are some other possibilities of partial mainstreaming.

Sacramental Preparation and Celebration

The child who is disabled may be able to use the same sacramental preparation materials as his or her brothers and sisters. Often this preparation is undertaken by parents with some reinforcement by the religious education teacher. This could be a way to help the child be more integrated in the family, even though he or she may be in a special religion class.

Celebration of sacraments should happen with the parish community regardless of the type of preparation. No matter how disabled the individual is, that person is equal to everyone in the family of God.

Music

Sometimes religious education programs have music at a specific

time where all assemble or individual grades meet. Students from the special education class can be mainstreamed into this activity without too much difficulty.

Eucharistic Celebrations

When religious education classes plan Eucharistic celebrations, the special education class should be included whenever possible. It may simply be an invitation to come, but it could also include participation as a banner carrier, a gift bearer, etc.

Retreats/Youth Ministry Programs

Teenage students who are disabled may be able to participate in junior or senior high retreats. Don't dismiss it as impossible, it could work!

Other parts of a youth ministry program, especially the social aspects (dances, hayrides, etc.) are also chances for mainstreaming. The biggest obstacle is *remembering* to include students who are disabled.

Family-Centered Programs

Some parishes offer programs where the entire family comes to learn together. What better way for the child who is disabled to be in the mainstream!

Each program is different. If families stay together for the entire experience, the family takes on the biggest role. If the group divides by age levels during the time period, just provide a teacher(s) for the children who are disabled.

HELPFUL HINTS FOR THE MAINSTREAMING TEACHER

—Know the child's strengths and weaknesses. Teach to or use the *strength*.

—Try to teach at the child's ability. This will be difficult because you have several other students and you're not a professional teacher. But know the level at which the child can succeed and put your expectations there.

—Use *positive reinforcement*. Find the things the child can do well, and praise the child for these things. Don't punish for mistakes or point out things which are done wrong.

—Avoid comparing children. More often than not this is done unconsciously, and not just with disabled children. Try to appreciate each child. Abilities vary, and each one has something special to offer.

—Arrange the environment to minimize distractions. This won't be easy because the room you use isn't your own. But try to be organized; have only necessary items on desks, etc.
—Use materials that are motivating, such as bright colors, simple, uncluttered pictures, clay, etc., depending on the grade level.
—Try to cut down on noise that isn't necessary.
—Establish guidelines for behavior with the entire class. Record them and keep them for future reference. Be consistent in carrying out these guidelines.
—Structure your class so students know what to expect. That doesn't mean rigidity but consistency. This procedure should reduce anxiety for everyone.
—Try to keep words at a minimum. Speak slowly and distinctly and encourage students to do the same.
—Give visual clues when you can, such as gestures, writing on the board, using an overhead projector.
—Give children enough time to formulate answers. Ask them to take time for thinking before answering. This will enable slower children to participate more fully in discussions.
—Use audio-visuals, but use them *well*, not as a time-filler.
—Let children help each other. This is healthy for everyone, a community-building experience rather than competition. Cooperation will enable each one to learn better.
—Have parents preview the material to be covered in class. For instance, if you'll be discussing Chapter 3, ask the parents to read it with their child before you cover it. They should highlight, circle or underline key words and concepts, write notes in the margin to help the child remember what was read. If there are discussion questions, let the child write down some ideas to use in the discussion.
—Find out whether the disabled child is on medication that could affect behavior or attention. You can't *do* anything about it, but the information will help you to understand the child better.
—Try to set mutual expectations with the child who is disabled. Ask the child what he or she can or can't do well. Check in periodically during the year for a "progress report" for both of you.
—Ask questions of the child, the parents, the teacher. Some questions can only be answered by direct contact, not by general principles such as those given here.

It's not so important for you to know correct terminology or to be able to assess the cause of a disability. Talk with parents. Contact the child's teacher(s) at school. Don't try to discover on your own what others have spent many hours to discern.

Above all, *remember your limitations*! You are *not* the child's main

teacher. Zero in on only those things he or she will need to function well in your class. You have this student for a very short time each week or month. You cannot accomplish what an experienced classroom teacher or parent can do. But what you do to make the religious learning experience easier for the child who is disabled is very important. *In fact, your caring may be the most significant aspect of your teaching.*

EVALUATION

Because you're handling something more than the ordinary, you should never feel compelled to continue at all costs. You may not be able to cope with the extra responsibility of a mainstreamed child with a disability. Or the class may not be benefitting from the child's presence. The disabled child may not be learning or may feel rejected, etc.

If any of these situations occur, don't think of it as a failure. There are some things you just aren't able to change.

Schedule in *at least* two evaluations—mid-year and end of the year. Be honest about what's happening. That means everyone—child, parents, teacher. But don't give up before you've given it a fair chance!

WHAT ABOUT ADULTS?

This chapter has dealt mainly with mainstreaming children in religious education programs. To talk about mainstreaming adults into parish life would require another chapter. There's a long way to go before that goal is reached, and there are as many possibilities as your imagination can create.

CONCLUSION

Go back to the situations on page 61 and see if you've had any new insights about your decisions. Better yet, write down your own situations and see whether mainstreaming is a viable alternative for one or some of your students. It's not an easy way out of providing special help, but a creative, challenging endeavor.

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"The central meaning of Jesus' ministry is bound up with the fact that he sought the company of people who, for one reason or another, were forced to live on the fringe of society."
—Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Handicapped People

Communicating Jesus to Non-Verbal Developmentally Disabled Persons

Betty Britschgi

Jesus came in all his humanity to show us the Father. His life was sign and sacrament of the Father's love for us. Jesus asks that we be his sacrament, his sign of love for each other. His life is extended through us to all whom we touch. We become signs of love, signs of Jesus' and our Father's love.

Our challenge in communicating Jesus to non-verbal developmentally disabled persons is great. Their dignity must always be respected and their fullest potential sought with esteem, love and

patience as our guides. The severe speech problems of many developmentally disabled persons and their subsequent difficulty with expressing their own simple needs, wants and understanding only increases our challenge to listen, learn and love. We must *show* Jesus to them in ways they can see, feel, hear and understand. The Word was made flesh through Jesus so that we could understand. And so must his word become flesh in us so that others will understand through us about our Father's love.

Language Development

Communication is an exchange of thoughts and feelings between persons. Language includes every means of communication in which thoughts and feelings are symbolized so as to convey meaning to others. Language includes such different forms of communication as speaking, writing, sign language, facial expression, gesture, pantomime, and art. (Hurlock, 1978, p. 162).

For many years, the programs for language development among developmentally disabled persons have concentrated on verbal language development. This approach has proven successful for a large number of disabled persons. However many are not successful at learning verbal communication even after years of therapy and various training attempts (Levett, 1969). Speech is a motor mental skill. It is the most difficult expressive language skill to master because of its mental aspect (Hurlock, p. 162).

A non-verbal person has no speech. However, a non-verbal person has what is defined as *non-verbal ability*. It is the power or special skill to perform an act or task, physical or mental, not involving the use of words; for example, mechanical ability (Grossman, p. 151). There is a slight difference between the terms non-verbal and low verbal. Low verbal means a person may use three or four word phrases to communicate. The spoken words may be distorted in their pronunciation and therefore difficult to understand. A person who has low verbal ability does have a little word power when he or she speaks (Hunter, 1978, p. 4). In reality, however, there is very little difference between non-verbal and low verbal persons because both engage in a lot of non-verbal communication.

In order to appreciate the *abilities* which non-verbal developmentally disabled persons have to communicate, we must look at the three basic levels of language development which occur for all children. These are inner language, receptive language and expressive language.

A very young child will understand through experience, the function of many things in his or her environment without knowing the

name of these various objects. This is known as inner language. It is that stage of language development in which a child learns to understand and manipulate his environment but not understand the symbols (words or names) given to represent things in his evnironment (Adler, 1964, p. 11). Hence a child understands through experiencing his or her immediate environment that "this" is for sleeping, "this" is for eating, "this" is for drinking, etc., without associating any symbols (words) to any particular thing or action.

Receptive language follows this inner language stage when the child associates the meaning of words with specific things, people and actions. The receptive language of children can be easily assessed by asking the child to do certain tasks (e.g. "Tommy, bring Daddy the ball"). Receptive language is dependent upon a child's experiences and his or her understanding of words. A child may have a very high receptive language level (understanding a vocabulary of 100 words or more) and yet not be able to speak. (Grossman, p. 156)

Expressive language is the ability to communicate with others. Expressive language forms include every means of communication: speaking, writing, sign language, gesture, facial expression, pantomime, art, touch, motoric communication (Grossman, p. 137). Speech is only one form of expressive language. The others are all non-verbal means of expression.

These levels of language development can then be applied to a non-verbal developmentally disabled person and in so doing we can establish some guideposts to help us in assessing his or her learning characteristics. This assessment of learning characteristics will assist us in our teaching.

What inner language does the individual demonstrate? Does the person operate with some degree of knowing things in his or her environment? Is this done without associating names or words with anything? This is inner language.

What is the individual's receptive language? How much is he or she able to understand of the spoken word? What is the individual's receptive language vocabulary? (Ten words? Fifty words?) Receptive language refers only to the vocabulary a person can understand.

What expressive language do you observe in this non-verbal individual? Is the person expressive through writing, sign language, facial expression, gestures, art or touching? *All* of these are non-verbal means of communication. It is necessary to listen and observe the language being used in his or her attempts to communicate.

What sorts of gross and fine motor skills does the person have? Does the person like to draw? Is this a medium for his or her expression? All these avenues for non-verbal expression must be explored in order to help the individual to grow, to mature in life as well as in faith.

Self-expression is a fundamental need of each person. For disabled people who cannot express their own personal needs and wants, the burden of their handicap is increased. To the extent that we provide non-verbal persons with occasions for self-expression, we develop their personality and provide opportunities for them to give of themselves. This freedom of expression gives us a precious occasion to know these persons and to enter into real contact with each individual, helping them also to experience faith.

Communicating With Gesture

The language of gestures is as unlimited as one's creative imagination will allow. A simple nod or smile, as well as the more complex movements of sign language are all included in what is termed gestural language. The range of expressive ability of gestures is therefore very broad.

Natural gestures are common to most people's experience:
—clenching our fists in anger
—facial expressions of happy and sad
—waving at a friend
—clapping our hands with excitement
—hugging someone we love

It's necessary to cultivate our abilities to express more in these ways. We must become more visible in all we try to communicate. In the expression of our faces, our hands, and our whole bodies we should reflect the love and joy that we feel in the message of love that we share. As we communicate with words, let us show what these words mean by "acting out" or doing as we say. For example: A person greets someone saying, "Hi, Tommy. Boy am I glad to see you. I missed you!" All of this is communicated verbally and also physically with smiles and hugs.

Likewise we are challenged to become more aware and sensitive to gestures used by others, especially when they cannot speak; to learn from individuals the meaning of their movements, whether it be someone tugging at their pants to indicate a toileting need, holding a toy as an indication of wanting to play, or banging a dinner plate to show "I'm hungry!" It takes time, trial and error to understand some gestures. Not all are as simple as a nod or a smile. Some severely disabled persons cannot move and they can only speak

through their eyes. Deeply sensitive, patient, and loving we must be to their "expressions" to us. With time and love we may come to know what their eyes are saying to us, because we have become friends. Remember that as we set out earnestly to bring Jesus to disabled persons we must be ever mindful and humbled by their reflection of Jesus to us.

Many non-verbal developmentally disabled persons have learned to use sign language. Keep in mind the wide range of abilities among developmentally disabled persons even among those who are non-verbal. Consider the broad differences within this group both mentally and physically. For example, take the task of spelling. Some non-verbal developmentally disabled persons can spell (mentally) and also fingerspell (manually), provided they are able to move their hands and have good finger dexterity. For others, fingerspelling is impossible because they are not able to spell or because they are too severely physically disabled.

Some non-verbal developmentally disabled persons have developed a signing vocabulary of 150 signs. Others have seemed to peak in expressing themselves through sign with only twenty-five signs or less. The number of signs does not matter. What matters is that people are expressing themselves.

There are several systems of sign language. Sign language is itself a generic term inclusive of several sign systems with some overlapping gestures among them (Abbott, Algozzine, & Kirschner, 1979). These sign language systems range from the more complex nature of Ameslan to the concrete nature of Amerind. Learning signs should be within the scope of an individual's intellectual and motor capabilities. With children or adults who are developmentally disabled, the capabilities they have to learn signs varies with the degree of their handicap. Their's may primarily be a mental handicap, which limits the sign language systems available for their use and comprehension. A person may also have physical limitations which must be considered. What finger dexterity does the individual have? What are his or her manual skills?

Knowing there are some signs more complex than others, be selective. Choose those signs which are simple and concrete enough to be used effectively with and by the non-verbal developmentally disabled person with whom you are communicating. And be creative to invent signs when you need to.

There is need to create religious signs which are visibly concrete in symbolizing the realities they represent. The Eucharist is bread; the chalice is a cup; the altar is a table. The bread, cup, and table at Mass all relate to the person of Jesus and the life and nourishment

he gives to us, his friends, as we come to his table. So therefore the reference for Eucharist shall be Jesus' bread. The chalice shall be referred to as Jesus' cup, and the altar shall be Jesus' table; and we, the members of his Church shall be Jesus' friends. Appropriate signs or gestures to represent each must be invented.

Communicating With Drama

Tell a story and act it out. It's OK to talk about Jesus; it's better to pretend that you are Jesus and act out the story you want to tell. Or let your student be Jesus and let him or her tell you what Jesus would do. Someone can be a narrator and tell the story very simply and slowly while you and your student act out the scene.

For more "high class" productions collect some remnants of material and put them into an old suitcase. It magically becomes a costume box guaranteed to help anyone look like Jesus or the Blessed Mother.

Doing drama can be very simple and can involve the total person in feeling the part and expressing or demonstrating his or her understanding of a certain role. A non-verbal developmentally disabled person may not be able to tell you who Jesus is but can show you how kind, gentle and loving Jesus was to people. To role play a story or a situation is a fun and convenient way to involve non-verbal persons in hearing, seeing and also doing. Drama is a way of "saying" by "doing."

Communicating With Pictures

The use of pictures is essential. As a point of reference, a picture can show what words can only speak of in our teaching. Pictures are concrete. They help to hold attention and interest. They provide opportunity for student participation. For example, a student can express her answers by pointing to an appropriate picture when asked, "Mary, point to the picture of Jesus." From an assortment of three or four different pictures a non-verbal developmentally disabled student can visually discriminate among the choices given and respond with a pointing gesture to express what he or she understands but cannot say.

Pictures can also help in teaching signs to your student. Using a simple picture of Jesus, the catechist can point to the picture, then sign and say "JESUS" simultaneously. The student can then begin to learn the sign and its picture reference by first imitating the catechist's sign. Some visual reference is helpful when teaching signs. Reinforcement in using the picture and sign together are important until the sign is learned.

Art is another means through which a non-verbal developmentally disabled person may be capable of self-expression. To engage the person in drawing can be a very effective instrument in religious education as well. The person may like to draw their story about a particular event or lesson which was shared.

Communicating With Music and Song

Music and singing are fun and motivating, and they help to create a real sense of joy and celebration. Music is also a great teaching aid with non-verbal developmentally disabled persons. A song can repeat and therefore reinforce a simple message without becoming monotonous. Let's remember that our children and adults who are developmentally disabled enjoy the security of repetition. They can listen to the same songs week after week and love it! So it is to our advantage to use songs which are helpful teaching aids as well as fun to sing.

The words of a song are important to consider because melodies and verses in their repetition easily become part of people's memories. In this way, songs can help to shape their perception of God, of Jesus, and of themselves. A refrain which repeats "Jesus is the Son of God our Father" has a great deal more benefit to students than "Jesus is the lily of the valley."

The language in songs should be meaningful. The words of a song may be adapted for use with persons who are developmentally disabled. The words of the original song text may be too numerous or too difficult to understand. Or the words may be less than good in terms of what they describe or refer to (example: "Jesus is the lily of the valley"). If a song sounds happy with a simple melody, but the words are too many or inappropriate, change them to suit the needs of your students and your lessons. Be creative!

Singing with non-verbal developmentally disabled persons is possible. It's nice when a few voices can blend together, but it's not necessary. The fun is in doing together, sounding and looking happy together.

Gestures should accompany songs whenever possible. This allows for non-verbal persons to really participate in the singing apart from just listening. Natural gestures such as clapping, shaking hands, and holding hands can easily fit the meaning of a word or phrase in a song text. An enjoyable way to learn signs is to make them part of a song. Repetition is fun and easier with music. Using gestures or signs with songs for persons who have developmental disabilities is not to suggest that each word of a song must be signed. This in fact becomes too complicated and the meaning of

the simple verse can be lost in the confusing movement of hands and arms. It is best to express in sign or gesture the main idea or concept in each phrase of the song. The song and gesture should move slowly enough to encourage meaningful expression.

Be selective. Choose songs which convey a good message, e.g. God is our loving Father (not a king or judge), Jesus loves me, I am special. A good song is a valuable teaching aid.

Communicating With Love

To feel the welcome of a handshake, the caring of an embrace, or the joy of a smile are basic human needs. These gestures stimulate a sense of belonging. Disabled persons need the warmth of our friendship along with our message of faith and love. We must be personal in sharing with them. Beyond the words we speak there must be the love we show to complete the message of Good News.

Words have limited expressive ability. Words labor to express the fullness of beauty, which is expressed and experienced more in the movement of dance, the brushings of an artist, or the vision of spring in full bloom. Words labor to express the fullness of love. What says more of loving than the tears of Jesus at the tomb of his friend, Lazarus? What says more of loving than a little child reaching for his daddy's arms and being swept into a belonging embrace—without a word. Words labor to express the fullness of our Father's love. The Word had to become flesh. God's love had to be seen and felt in Jesus. God's love had to be made profoundly visible in the ultimate sacrifice of the Son.

The love of Jesus can be perceived at many different levels of development. However, we can teach a child love only by loving the child. For any child to know and experience God's love, the child must know and feel it through those to whom his or her care is entrusted. Developmentally disabled persons are even more dependent on us to "show and tell" of our Father's love for them. We must begin to see ourselves as the instruments who sign and sacrament the Father's love as Jesus did.

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"The Church fully associated herself with the initiatives and praise-worthy efforts being made in order to improve the situation of the disabled, and she intends to make her own specific contribution thereto."

—Document of the Holy See for the International Year of Disabled Persons

A Formation Program for Volunteer Catechists

Betty Britschgi and Kathryn Jennings, OSB

CATECHESIS, THE PERSON WHO IS DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED, AND THE CATECHIST

What are the components of catechesis?

—Sharing faith life
—Experiencing liturgical worship
—Taking part in Christian service
—Participating in religious instruction

Who is the person with a developmental disability?

—A developmental disability is a disability attributable to mental retardation, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, or another neurological condition of an individual which is closely related to mental retardation or requires similar treatment, and which originates in childhood, is likely to continue, and constitutes a substantial handicap to the individual. (H. Grossman, Ed., *Manual on Terminology and Classification in Mental Retardation*, Baltimore: Garamond/Pridemark Press, 1973, p. 132.)

—A person with a developmental disability is a person first, with special needs and gifts.

"What handicapped individuals need, first of all, is acceptance in a difference that can neither be denied nor overlooked. No acts of charity or justice can be of lasting value to handicapped people unless they are informed by a sincere and understanding love that penetrates the wall of strangeness and affirms the common humanity underlying all distinction. We must love others from the inside out, so to speak, accepting their difference from us in the same way we accept our difference from them." (*Pastoral Statement*)

Why teach religion to people with developmental disabilities?

—God loves and accepts us as we are; He wishes to make himself available to all.
—Mental development is not proportionate to spiritual capacity.
—People with developmental disabilities can make choices; they can grow in love and they can fail in love.
—They need instruction and support to help shape their decisions.
—They should be taught what they are capable of learning.
—They need feelings of self-worth and acceptance in order to realize their capabilities.

"Let such children (mentally retarded) approach the Lord...and let us not be among those who try to keep them from Him. Let us believe in their worth, in their reason for living. Let us know, in one word, how to love them as God Himself loves them; He who has His reasons for allowing their life, for maintaining their presence among us, on our earth and in His Church, of which they also are members." (Bissonier)

What do we teach in special religious education?

—God is our loving Father who made us and gave us the gifts of His creation.
—God sent His Son, Jesus, to show us how to love and care for one another.
—Jesus died and came back to life again.
—Jesus shares Himself with us in Holy Communion.
—Sacraments are special signs of God's love.
—Prayer is talking with God.

"The goal of specialized catechesis is to present Christ's love and teaching to each handicapped person in as full and rich a manner as he/she can assimilate." (*National Catechetical Directory*, #196)

What is the vocation of the catechist?

—The catechist has the responsibility and the privilege of sharing Jesus with children, youth, or adults who are developmentally disabled.
—The catechist needs to focus on the essentials of faith, to perceive the depth in the simple, to be sensitive to the symbols that will teach and awaken faith in the person who is developmentally disabled.
—Without any teaching aids or lesson plans the catechist teaches that the student is good and lovable and valuable.
—Openness to receive from the students affirms them in their own giftedness.
—The catechist must surely believe in her/his students so that they may believe in themselves.
—In everything the catechist must be gentle and have a sense of humor, for being Christian is a joyful way of life.

TEACHING METHODS

Some learning difficulties for people with developmental disabilities

—Short memory.
—Short attention span—has difficult time staying on a task for a long period of time.
—Slow language development—may not understand what you say, and/or may not be able to express self clearly. The following are the three basic levels of language development:

1) Inner language—first stage of language development—a child learns the function of something without associating it with a specific word label which is spoken or signed;

2) Receptive language—child understands the meaning of words spoken or signed;

3) Expressive language—speech, gesture, signs, writing, touch, art.

—Inability to think abstractly. "Courage," "beauty" are abstract terms. We cannot touch, hear, see, smell or taste these things. They cannot be experienced through our senses.
—Hyperactivity—activity level is increased.
—Poor self-image—has a low opinion of self and of his/her abilities.
—Distractibility—noises or objects may take attention away from the subject matter.

—"Failure avoiders"—often refuses to participate in activities because of fear of failing at the task.
—Poor ability to follow directions.
—Perception problems—may not see or hear things as the average person sees and hears.
—Limited ability to generalize—has difficulty in applying a principle from one situation to another.

Some teaching techniques

—Repetition—present the same concept or idea in a variety of ways.
—Routine and structure—allows the person security and eliminates confusion.
—Simple language—do not "talk down" to the person. Use simple, but not childish terms, such as:

church . . . house, home
community . . . family, friends
communion . . . Jesus' bread
chalice . . . Jesus' cup
altar . . . Jesus' table
apostles . . . Jesus' friends
Mass . . . party, meal

—Be concrete—avoid abstractions. Use words that can be understood through experiences of touching, seeing, smelling, tasting and hearing.
—Allow students time to communicate their ideas to you. Encourage them to express themselves verbally or through gestures or sign. With speech-impaired children who have difficulty making themselves understood, develop a non-commital response: "Is that so!" "Oh?" Encourage a motor response.
—Sign Language with low I.Q. and non-verbal children:

1) Use an appropriate sign system.

2) Check with the child's schoolteachers. What signs are being used?

3) Limit to a small and consistent sign vocabulary.

4) Request that parents reinforce these signs at home.

—Be brief—use short activities.
—Give clear directions, one at a time.

—Be consistent and gently firm. Set limits, letting students know what is expected of them. This gives them the security of knowing what behavior is appropriate and acceptable.
—Provide a calm, friendly, supportive atmosphere.
—Make failure an impossibility—help students to realize their limitations yet feel successful.
—Teach at a slow pace.
—Teach one thing at a time. Break the concept down into sequential steps.
—Be interested and enthusiastic about what you are teaching.
—Expectancy—expect the best.
—Participation—encourage the student to become actively involved in the lesson.
—Praise—give honest praise when students do something good. Thank them when they are kind or helpful.
—Be flexible.
—Keep a sense of humor.
—Questioning

1) Call on student to affirm teacher's statement: "It was Jesus, wasn't it?"

2) Fact-finding: questions begin with who, what, why, where. "Who is Jesus' mother?"

3) Interpretation: questions begin with why. "Why does Jesus come to us in Holy Communion?"

—Prompting

1) Student repeats answers given by teacher.

2) Teacher supplies all but the last word.

3) Teacher may frame with her/his lips or supply first sound of word to be given by student.

—Reinforcement—give immediate feedback of correct response, such as: "Yes, that's right," or "Good!"—then repeat or rephrase answer.
—Shaping behaviors

1) Model—show with your own behavior what you want your students to do (fold hands, bow head, etc.).

2) Set limits and be consistent. Student needs to know what is all right today is always all right; specify what is unacceptable.

3) Be generous with praise.

—Dealing with distractions

1) Physically assist (arm around shoulder; grasp chin with fingers to position head for eye contact).

2) Recall attention by calling for a motor response. ("Let's act out this story about Jesus").

3) Surprise approach with instructional materials (pull out a puppet or felt-board or balloon).

4) Take a break, then return to lesson.

CURRICULUM

An important part of catechist formation for special religious education is the study of the curriculum, including how to adapt it to particular needs. There are some resources that are written specifically for developmentally disabled children and youth, and there are some which are easily adapted. Any curriculum chosen will still need to be adapted for your students, for each student brings a unique learning style and religious experience. Several curricula are examined in some detail in another section of this book.

Two extremes to be avoided are:

—Presuming the person who is developmentally disabled can learn nothing;
—Making no allowance for the handicap.

Curriculum should be

—Individualized—taking differences into account.
—Sequential—moving from the concrete to abstract, each lesson building on another.
—Varied—employ many techniques.
—Sensory—see, hear, feel, touch.
—Flexible—response determines timing.
—Practical—application of religious truths should take the form of witnessing to them in our lives.

A MODEL LESSON PLAN

Preparation

—Begin with prayer.
—If scripture is part of the lesson, then the passage should be read, re-read and pondered before the adapted version is considered.
—Lesson plan should be thoughtfully read to get a feel for the flow of the explanation and to anticipate possible responses and questions.
—Materials should be collected. If a project is to be made, it is wise to anticipate problem spots.
—Each part of the lesson plan should be examined with an eye to the part it will play toward achieving the goal.

The Environment

—Space is important; distractions should be kept to a minimum.
—Create a prayer center with table, Bible, candle, flowers, banners—a place where all gather for opening and closing song and prayer.
—Lesson place can be another room or just another place in the same room with table and chairs or desks.

Schedule of a 60 minute class without Mass

—15 minutes—welcome, songs, opening prayer or paraliturgy that sets the theme for the day's lesson.
—15 minutes—lesson. (Lesson center, small groups.)
—15 minutes—reinforcement activity—may take the form of drama, art, a letter, a walk outdoors. (Small groups.)
—10 minutes—sharing what each learned that day. (Prayer center with whole group.)
—5 minutes—shared prayer and closing songs. (Prayer center with whole group.)

Schedule of a 40 minute class with parish Sunday Mass

(Class begins 10 minutes before Mass; families go to Mass)

—10 minutes—welcome, songs, opening prayer.
—15 minutes—lesson.
—10 minutes—reinforcement activity.
—5 minutes—sharing prayer of petition.
—Join families at the beginning of the Offertory of the Mass.

After-class chats with parents

—Take a few minutes after class to share with parents, group parents or guardians what good things were shared in class.
—Encourage parents to continue lesson all week.
—Share with the parents what they can do at home to reinforce the lesson.

TEACHING AIDS

Media

—*Films.* Films are generally not useful as instructional aids with developmentally disabled students. Because it is not possible to control the rate at which stimuli is presented to the student, catechist-student interaction during the film presentation is almost impossible. The student will very likely become passive while viewing a film and no instruction will be gained.
—*Filmstrips.* These instructional aids can be effectively used since the speed of the presentation can be controlled by the catechist. The catechist can select only one or any number of frames from a filmstrip that will be helpful in presenting a lesson. The cassette recording which accompanies the filmstrip should not be used. Instead, the catechist should read the narration which accompanies the filmstrip and when necessary adapt the language to appropriately suit the student(s) and the lesson to be taught. Though the use of a filmstrip projector can be fun and interesting to a child, it is a more expensive and less practical form of instruction than using pictures.
—*Records and tapes.* Using records and tapes of music with developmentally disabled students can be more fun and stimulating than instructional. The problem with using these media is that the catechist cannot control the speed of presentation. Professionally recorded music moves too quickly for most developmentally disabled students to join in singing. It is more helpful to use recorded music as "mood music" to welcome students into their learning center. While catechists greet their students, background music can help to create an atmosphere with happy or soothing sounds, whichever suits the students best. (John Philip Souza marches would hardly serve to calm very hyperactive children!)

Drama

—Role play during the lesson. Plan to role play a situation or brief reading from the gospels that will demonstrate the concept being

taught in the lesson. Without rehearsal students can role play with catechists during a lesson in order to gain more understanding by "doing" (e.g., sharing, helping, loving).

—Drama during the gospel reading at Mass.

1) Read the gospel carefully.

2) Adapt the language so that the message of the gospel is related very simply.

3) Assign one student or catechist to narrate the story.

4) Assign roles to the students and catechists. Catechists become involved in the story with the students, not as spectators.

5) One person narrates as the students act out the story corresponding to the narration. There should be pauses in the narration so that students have time to act according to the story that is being told.

6) Students can rehearse in order to speak, sign or gesture for themselves during the story.

(option) Catechist can accompany a student closely, and speak with or for her/him.

(option) Catechist can physically assist any students who have difficulty following the narration by themselves, supporting their role in the story.

Song and Gesture

—Songs can teach.

1) *Language*—The words of a song are important to consider before teaching the song, because songs are repeated and their melodies and verses can easily become part of our memories. In this way songs help to *shape our perception* of God, of Jesus, and ourselves. The words of our songs should emphasize that God is our loving Father.

2) *Repetition/Reinforcement*—A simple song can repeat and therefore reinforce a simple message without becoming monotonous. Let's remember that our children and adults who are developmentally disabled enjoy the security of repe-

tition. They can sing the same songs week after week and absolutely love it! So it is to our advantage to teach them songs which are helpful teaching aids as well as fun to sing.

3) Above all, music is fun...and motivating...and creates a real sense of celebration!

—Gestures.

1) Whenever possible, gestures should accompany our songs. Because so many persons with developmental disabilities are speech-impaired, to combine gesture with song allows for their full participation.

2) Natural gestures such as clapping, shaking and holding hands, can easily fit the meaning of a word or phrase in a song text.

3) Sign language used by the deaf can also accompany our singing with developmentally disabled students. The deaf signs for friend, Jesus, and love are good additions to our songs. However, deaf signs are often more complex and less concrete in terms of relating to the concept they represent, and so many deaf signs are too difficult for persons who are mentally retarded to understand. When a deaf sign is too difficult, then a more natural gesture of your own invention which more concretely represents the concept is appropriate.

Dance

—Dance as celebration of a lesson.

1) Reflect on the Word of God.
   a) What is the mood?
   b) What is the tempo?

2) Choose music which will reflect mood and tempo.

3) Decide on simple gestures and body movements which the children can do.

4) Teach gestures as you retell the story.

5) Children and catechists all participate in dancing of story. Omit narration.

—Dance in Eucharistic liturgy.

1) Entrance processions can be danced to emphasize theme or solemnize entrance hymn.
   a) Teach simple procession steps with pauses and turns to music.
   b) Group can gesture the words of the song while processing in.
   c) Plan ceremonial carrying in of flowers and candles.

2) Song after Communion.
   a) During singing, a few dancers express the sentiments of all.
   b) Children may follow a leader.

3) Closing hymn.
   a) This can be much like the opening dance.
   b) It should reflect the joy of celebration.

Objects from the Environment

—Selection of objects.

1) Objects must be familiar to the students.

2) Choose objects associated with pleasant experiences in students' day to day living.

3) Eliminate any objects related to school failure of students.

—Classroom learning center.

1) Assemble "sharables" (e.g., cookies, crackers, plants, flowers, balloons, candles, water, etc.)

2) Many "sharables" can be brought by the students to help in demonstrating the concept of a lesson.

—Nature's learning center.

1) Students and catechist can walk outside among the trees, flowers, and homes to review a lesson.

2) Students and catechist can treasure hunt for God's gifts of creation.

Story Puzzles

—Making a puzzle.

1) Use any picture that will help to tell a story, such as:
   a) pictures relating gospel stories;
   b) pictures relating any action or theme that will encourage the students' participation and enhance learning.

2) Mount the picture on cardboard (using rubber cement).

3) Cut the picture into as many pieces as desired (using a heavy paper cutter). Remember that smaller and many pieces make the task more difficult; larger and fewer pieces make the task easier.

4) Cover each puzzle piece with clear contact paper to protect it and make it durable.

Pictures

—Pictures communicate best when:

1) They relate to the students' experience.

2) They are simple and free of distracting detail.

3) They reflect the real world in color and form.

—Making a picture file.

1) Make a collection of pictures which are useful as teaching aids from sources such as magazines, calendars, and pattern books. Family photos might be requested far in advance so that if none is available, they can be taken.

2) Mount each picture on construction paper using rubber cement, then cover with contact paper to make them more durable.

3) Make a simple filing system that will organize your pictures into useful categories such as:
   a) family (members and activities)
   b) animals (pets, farm, wild)
   c) children (at play, sharing, helping)
   d) nature (flowers, trees, water, mountains)
   e) people (various ages and ethnic groups)
   f) interpersonal relationships (ways of saying "yes" and "no" to God)

g) Jesus (birth, as a child, as a man, as loving, as helping, at Last Supper)
h) Church (churches, church leaders, Mass, sacraments)
i) Mary

—Drawings.

1) Crayons, chalk, and stick figures will do.

2) Storytelling approach is best. In the presence of the students, the catechist tells a story, while making a simple drawing.

3) Drawings help sustain attention, and make the story more concrete.

Puppetry

—Teachers can use puppets to:

1) gain rapport with students.

2) tell a story.

3) read a story.

4) ask questions.

5) sing a song.

6) stimulate verbal expression in children.

—Children can use puppets too!

1) Give puppets to your students to hold.

2) Be sure to give the children something to do with their puppets.

3) Have students tell a story.

4) Ask students and their puppets simple questions.

5) Ask about emotions.

6) Ask about something the students have already learned.

Note: Use puppets which are easiest for your students to hold and move. People puppets rather than animal puppets are more appropriate to use for religious instruction. Puppets have universal appeal and they help children in their language development.

Flannel Board Stories

—Telling the story.

1) Study the story so that you know it well without having to read it.

2) Become familiar with the figures, knowing when to place them on the flannel board and when to remove them in order to present the story without much confusion.

3) Be enthusiastic. The students are watching the flannel board as well as listening to you.

4) Be prepared for interruptions from the children, or interrupt the story yourself to start discussions.

5) Change the names of the characters in the story to those of the children you are teaching.

—Retelling the story.

1) Catechist can retell the story, letting each child place one or two figures on the board at the appropriate time.

2) Children can retell the story in their own words and place the figures on the board.

Students' Books

—Making the students' books.

1) Obtain spiral-bound notebooks with blank pages. (Spiral binding is not necessary, as long as pages do not easily tear out.)

2) Decorate the covers with pictures of Jesus or any other appropriate religious pictures (perhaps communion pictures). Apply the pictures to the covers with rubber cement, then cover both with clear contact paper to make it more durable.

3) Students can write their own names, assisted by the catechist if necessary, on the cover or on the first page of the book.

—Using the students' books.

1) Catechist can print a summary of each lesson on a page of the students' books, and illustrate it with pictures used for the lesson or with drawings made by the students and/or the catechist.

2) Students take their books home each week and bring them to the next lesson.

3) Parents can use the students' books at home to review each week's lesson and to reinforce the catechist's teaching.

4) For very young children, for whom taking care of such a booklet can prove a real challenge, several pages (just enough for a few lessons on a single theme) can be used.

Catechist Kit

—The kit is made from any cardboard box which has a lid. The lid becomes the catechist's flannel board, after its inside is covered with flannel board material.
—Size is determined by whatever is comfortable for the catechist to carry. The kit accompanies the catechist to each lesson.
—The kit contains many practical and helpful teaching aids which prepare the catechist to teach the lesson of the day. A catechist kit should include: crayons, scratch paper, scissors, glue, puppet, picture file, flannel board with felt figures.

CELEBRATION: PRAYER, LITURGY AND COMMUNITY

Prayer

Spiritual development depends more upon the relationship formed with God than upon theological knowledge gained. Prayer is essential. It is through prayer that one is able to experience God's love, compassion, forgiveness, mercy, and concern. The person who is developmentally disabled can develop a deep and close relationship with God through prayer. The catechist has the privilege of welcoming the disabled person into the faith community, so that together they may experience the tremendous love that God has to share with each person.

The following are a few ideas that may help persons who are developmentally disabled to experience prayer:
—Physical atmosphere

1) Have a special room or place designated for prayer. There should be a sense of peace and quiet.

2) Set the prayer table with Bible, candle, banner, etc.

3) Seating arrangement should be in a circle or semicircle that includes everyone, with the prayer table as the center and focus.

—Physical readiness of each person

1) *Call to prayer.* The leader of the group invites everyone to pray. For example, "Let us pray to God, our Father. Fold your hands and bow your heads."

2) *Period of silence.* The leader waits quietly for everyone to be ready. This is necessary because prayer posture is important. Human beings need to be physically involved in praying. More is accomplished by active participation than by passive participation. Prayer is difficult to "teach," simple to experience.

—Types of prayer

1) Silent prayer

2) Vocal prayer
   a) Repetition—e.g.,
      Leader: "Father God"
      Group: "Father God"
      Leader: "We love you very much."
      Group: "We love you very much."
   b) Formal prayer—e.g., the "Our Father"
   c) Spontaneous prayer
   d) Singing

3) Gestures and/or sign language used with vocal prayer.

4) Dance—using total body movements.

Liturgy

—The Mass should be adapted so as to allow the fullest possible understanding and participation. The liturgy should be designed to be personal and brief.
—Some notable features of an adapted liturgy are:

1) Processions.

2) Singing with gestures.

3) Simplified scripture readings.

4) Dialogue homilies.

Community

—Role of celebration for developmentally disabled people.

1) Celebrations are part of what it means to be human.

2) The lives of many developmentally disabled people are devoid of happy experiences (e.g., receiving awards, graduations, weddings).

3) Celebration by its very nature is social. Emphasis on reaching out to others in celebration is particularly important to developmentally disabled persons who tend to be very egocentric because of their immaturity and limited experience.

—Role of religious celebrations for developmentally disabled persons.

1) Christianity is a religion which celebrates life in its various moments—birth, growth, death, loving, sharing, forgiving. Jesus has given us many examples of gathering people together to share a happiness or a happening.

2) Celebration should be an integral aspect of religious programs, for being a Christian is a joyful way of life.

3) Sacramental celebrations should be very special for the developmentally disabled person. These should be celebrated with a party so that all in the community can show their happiness.

4) Religious celebrations can take on a greater meaning for developmentally disabled people if they are presented in an understandable manner and allow for active participation.

5) Even though religious celebrations teach, their main function is not to teach, but to bring people into the event being celebrated.

"The fundamental approach to the problems connected with the sharing by the disabled in the life of society must be inspired by the principles of integration, normalization, and personalization."

–Document of the Holy See for the International Year of Disabled Persons

Special Religious Education Curricula

SPRED-CHICAGO

Sr. Mary Therese Harrington, SH

Spred-Chicago refers to three interwoven realities; a program, a method, and a mentality.

Program

Spred begins with the premise that developmentally disabled people are educable in faith, if they have the opportunity to belong to a community of faith that is part of a person's parish.

The backbone of the program from a structural point of view is the Spred parish chairperson endorsed each year in writing by the

pastor. This representative of the pastor and the parish has the mission to locate the developmentally disabled children, adolescents, young adults and adults in the parish. Along with the Spred parish chairpersons in surrounding parishes, plans are drawn up and implemented to provide communities of faith to which disabled parishioners are invited to belong. At the present time (1981) there are 104 appointed Spred chairpersons in good standing in the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Each disabled person has a sponsor or a helper, who like a godparent accompanies him/her in the journey of faith within the community. So in a group with seven disabled persons, there would be seven fellow parishioners as sponsors. The structure of the group has many similarities with a catechumenate group, but the time span for the group to be together is much longer. Sponsors and disabled friends have been together for years. However, there are groups specifically for children, for adolescents, for young adults, and for adults. The developmental phases in a person's life have to be coped with in the catechetical process used.

Each Spred group has a core team made up of the Spred parish chairperson, responsible for liaison with the parish at large; the leader catechist who is responsible for the method used in the general catechesis; and the activity catechist responsible for the preparation phase of the method.

When the Spred program operates out of a state or private residential facility, the principle of church integration still applies. One of the main jobs of the religious worker in a facility is to get the census straight, identifying the religious background of each resident, obtaining parental or guardian consent, and setting out to obtain a chairperson from the religious communion represented by the residents. Typically, for example, a Lutheran church will appoint and mission a person to build communities of faith for Lutherans in the facility, who then become church members of that Lutheran church. The sponsor is of the same religious background as the disabled person. Just as for the Catholics, the main religious events are held in the church of the person's affiliation. The small communities of faith are always and only bridges to the larger church community. It is the task of the Spred chairperson to stimulate signs of belonging.

In various areas of the Archdiocese there are Spred resource persons called *peervisors* (peers who try to foster vision).

Spred-Chicago is also a resource for other dioceses who want to set up a program. Eight dioceses in the United States, two in England, and one in Northern Ireland have sent directors of special

religious education to Chicago for professional preparation for diocesan leadership. Once these leaders have completed their professional orientation, they retain affiliation with Spred-Chicago for catechetical materials that are still in manuscipt form, and for mutual support.

Spred-Chicago helps leaders from other dioceses to prepare to:
—train parish catechists
—coordinate work among parishes and church groups
—model good catechesis in their own diocesan resource centers
—foster parish integration by building up a network of chairpersons.

Spred-affiliated diocesan leaders meet every other year to:
—present their own diocesan policies, priorities and goals
—demonstrate the progress being made
—support and resource one another
—develop insight into the method being used.

Method

The method used by Spred-Chicago was designed by Fr. Jean Mesny, currently of Louvain University (Method Vivre).

The premise for the method is that each person has his or her own salvation history which is discovered together in the community of faith. The structure of the method always begins with one's own life experience, stimulated by a symbol or a story. As one evokes one's life experience in the group, under the guidance of a leader, a common thread is usually discovered (the intentionality of the symbol). A sense of bonding grows as we all become aware that our stories have similarities. The group moves from the sense of my story to our story. This second moment or phase is referred to as *Interiorization.*

Not only do I have my story and we have our story, but at some point our stories intersect with the story of the People of God led by Jesus to the Father (Liturgical Evocation). This sense of belonging readies us to hear the Word of God as believing people (Biblical Evocation). Finally, the Word of God is addressed to each one: "John, today Jesus says to you..." (Action and Message). The group then celebrates with song and gesture.

The method is most appropriately referred to as a form of liturgical catechesis because the format used has many ritual elements. The format is close to the liturgy of the Word.

Because it takes a certain amount of concentration to enter into this method, a readiness or preparation period is needed. A special environment is structured for the time together which usually lasts

from forty-five minutes to an hour. The environment is prepared with many elements common to a Montessori environment. The room is set up with areas for prepared materials: sensory-motor, art, everyday life. As one works with these materials, one becomes normalized in the Montessori sense, in harmony with self, others, the environment. When a certain harmony has been achieved, one can be present to oneself and others in a sacred environment. One is ready to become aware of life in faith.

After the liturgical catechesis, the group returns to the first environment (the normalization area) to share refreshments together. This time together is often referred to as the agape, the sharing of food in love.

A great deal of care is taken with this time together around the sharing of food. Members of the group take turns bringing refreshments. Glass dishes, placemats, cloth napkins, flowers and candles are used to help the group share food in the mood of the catechesis. A Spred group fosters table fellowship. Everyone helps in the preparation, service, and clean-up. The agape closes with songs and clear good-byes, which sometimes are hard when the members want to stay together. A session usually last two hours.

For every two hours with developmentally disabled or learning disabled members, the core team and sponsors or helpers have a two hour session where they address their own faith development, using the method but the exchange of stories being more in depth. As this adult community (members are over 21 years of age, giving an initial two year commitment) becomes able to be explicit about faith, the developmentally disabled members have a chance to be nourished by mature Christians. With this type of support and long term commitment, Spred groups generally have a long life span. Adult groups need also to take time to deal with group problems, integration projects, sacramental plans, liturgical preparations, and growth problems.

Mentality

The Spred-Chicago mentality is primarily symbolic. We begin by acknowledging that symbolic knowing is open to those of us who have problems with some aspects of intellectual functioning.[1] Symbolic knowing is participatory knowing. When our experiences are evoked and re-lived we have better sense of our lives from the perspective of faith. Bit by bit, we become aware of how God is at work in our lives. The world around us, our disabilities, our family, our friends, our parish community, all speak of God at work.[2] Our education in faith is to become aware of God's revelation in our

lives. Gradually we experience our belief in this God revealed in Jesus. We begin to experience hope and love. This is our education in the community of faith, this is our education as Christians.

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JOURNEY WITH JESUS

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with
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James F. King, Ph.D.
Milwaukee: Cardinal Stritch College, 1975, 1977, 1978

Journey With Jesus is a program of special religious education based on the premise that the people of God are in pilgrimage. As we journey with Jesus to the Father, we recognize some persons among us with special educational needs. They are also called to communion with Jesus. In great part, their communion depends on the willingness of fellow pilgrims to be catechists. And in order to perform this task, a program model and a curriculum guide are necessary.

The program model is family-oriented and calls for one-to-one teaching of children, small group discussion with adults, a program for parents, one for siblings and a weekly schedule of teacher training (½ hour), followed by concurrent special religious education classes, parent program and sibling program (½ hour each). Everyone then reunites for celebration of a simple liturgy which gives prayerful expression of material learned that day. A brief evaluation period for catechists concludes the session. All aspects of the program model are described in detail in *Director's Handbook* which accompanies the curriculum guide.

A three-part, nine-level guide was developed for children and adolescents, and a three-part guide was created for adults. The curriculum guide *Journey With Jesus* was developed and field-tested for seven years in programs serving a wide range of age and ability levels. It takes into account both spiritual and psychological devel-

opment. The manner of presentation and mode of response recognizes three typical pedagogical levels. One sequence develops readiness; the next level provides immediate and specific introduction to sacrament; the highest level suggests a sacramental spirituality appropriate for the developmentally disabled adolescent in the community.

Theologically, the curriculum has been organized to highlight Jesus' call to his people perceived in a threefold manner: Call to Communion, Call to Reconciliation, and Call to Service. Therefore, the accent of each year's plan centers around the theme of one of these perceived calls and its sacramental expression in Christian worship. It is presumed that understanding prepares for prayer, which is ritualized in sacrament, and finds in this prayer its best expression.

Our curriculum objectives are to put persons with special education needs in touch with God and his Church, as well as to prepare them for Christian witness in day-to-day living. In designing this series we have been conscious of the pastoral-theological principles outlined in the *General Catechetical Directory* (Rome, 1971) and have selected a methodology appropriate for the spiritual development of developmentally disabled youth. *The call of the Father through his Son is answered by humanity through the Spirit*, is cited as the most central theological principle. A developmental framework based on sacramental initiation is the organizing principle.

In issuing the *General Catechetical Directory*, the Roman Commission cited twenty-three outstanding elements of the Christian message. No attempt was made to isolate those concepts appropriate to youth, nor was judgment made relative to their pedagogical difficulties. In this curriculum guide we have included all the outstanding elements cited, but have given particular attention to those considered more necessary and appropriate for developmentally disabled youths.

Trinity is the first and most central concept. The remaining twenty-two rest within the first. Conceptually, these outstanding elements as listed in the *General Catechetical Directory* are clustered under five headings: Trinity (#1-3), Incarnation (#4-8), Sacrament (#9-13), Man (#14-18), Church (#19-23). These clusters imply distinct but not separate realities. Briefly described the concept-clusters suggest:

1. Trinity: God our Father sent Jesus, the Special Son to communicate salvation to people and to create them as redeemed community in the Spirit.

2. Incarnation: Jesus, the Son of God, took on the form of a human being, so that humanity could become godly through the redemption and action of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus was Sign of God among people, the Church is Sign of God's continuous saving presence among us.

3. Church: as saving institution. the Church is the sign of God-with-us. The Church is the Body of Christ redeemed in his Death-Resurrection. Yet it seeks redemption as its pilgrim members cooperate with the Spirit in their struggle with sin and evil.

4. Sacrament: in each Sacrament Jesus is coming to us in a saving way by the action of his Church. In these signs, Jesus shows us that he is close to us, that he loves us and saves us. Each Sacrament brings certain gifts and challenges to those who meet God there in faith.

5. Man: the people of God are in pilgrimage throughout history. Men and women are called to holiness in communion with Jesus their leader. People are free but fragile. In the power of God they are called to be Christian.

Pedagogical Progression

Communion: Lessons related to Communion emphasize the call of God for union with him in prayer and sacrament.

At the most basic level, children become familiar with prayer. They come to learn about friendship with God, its meaning and its expression in Christian celebration.

On the second level of difficulty, students celebrate first Communion. They learn the meaning and manner of the sacramental meeting with God in Eucharist.

At the most developed level, young adults are helped to examine the broader dimensions of communion with God in prayer, in scripture and in a spirituality based on the *Our Father.*

Reconciliation: The sequences related to reconciliation emphasize God's call that we be converted. The lessons treat topics related to moral development by encouraging grateful recognition of God's gifts, by citing misuse of these gifts, and by teaching signs of reconciliation available to God's free and fragile children.

The basic level singles out God's gifts and initiates the student to sacramental forgiveness. The most advanced level encourages a life of reconciliation and encourages a moral development through response to the Gospel.

Confirmation: These sequences seek to demonstrate areas where the Christian is called to service by the demands and challenges within the community.

The most basic level familiarizes the student with Mary, her perfect response to God's call, and the implications of her response in the life of Christians.

The second level explains and celebrates the rite of Confirmation, as well as its place in Christian maturity.

The most advanced level examines the implications of the Christian Confirmation "yes" to the manifold calls to worship and to responsible service for others.

The Church has adopted a three-year cycle of readings. The same system is followed in the adult program, *Gospel Study*. Gospels being read on the respective Sundays in the parishes are concurrently being studied in the special religious education program. Sometimes only part of a Gospel is presented. This occurs if more than one message is included in the designated passage. The goal in the special religious education program is consistently to focus sharply on a single theme and message, and to develop it to the point where it is retained and applied in the day-to-day living of the developmentally disabled adult. In succeeding years, as the passages are repeated, the emphasis might be shifted, or another aspect of the message might be considered. As is true of the general population, the developmentally disabled adult can ponder each scriptural passage many times, and each time gain a new insight.

In the development of scripted lesson plans, paraliturgies, and celebrations, an attempt was made to meet the needs of the inexperienced catechist. These can serve as lifelines for the neophyte and as helpful guides to the experienced teacher.

Journey With Jesus is predicated on the belief that the developmentally disabled person *can* learn basic doctrine and traditions, and can develop a genuine faith life, *if* proper instruction and modeling by teachers is given. Unique to this series is the use of behavioral objectives which clearly challenge teachers and learners to *do* something about their religious beliefs. Religion is a life to be lived; it is a journey that we take with Jesus to the Father who waits for us with immeasurable love.

GOD'S LOVE AND CREATION ARE FOR EVERYONE

Carol Podlasek, CSJ

This is the central theme of *Gift*, a two-year special religious education program that endeavors to help mentally handicapped persons experience, grow in and respond to God's love within a loving community of believers. It is non-denominational in format, with separate suggestions for individual and/or group reception of the Sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation. *Gift* was developed through classroom work and revised with feedback from teachers who used the pilot program. The entire program includes a teacher's guide with an introduction, complete plans and colorful student handouts for fifty-nine experiences, and a set of flannel board figures printed on tagboard.

There are three units of experiences:

Unit I "Thank You, God Our Father"
Unit II "Jesus, the Father's Gift of Love"
Unit III "Our Gift of Love to God"

Repeated throughout Unit I are the ideas: God is our Father; God loves us; God gives us many gifts to show love for us. Because of the great number and variety of these gifts, the theme of God's love is expressed over and over without becoming monotonous and without affording opportunity for puppet-type memorization. The first unit is the shortest, and consists of six experiences and one celebration. When the program is started in the Fall, the celebration usually comes appropriately around the Thanksgiving holiday.

The second unit continues the theme of God's gifts, and centers on Jesus, the Father's special and greatest gift. Each of the stories about Jesus expresses that Jesus is God; Jesus loves us; Jesus wants us to be happy. Emphasis is put on Jesus' friendship with and care for everyone, rather than on His power. He is someone to whom everyone can relate and whom everyone can imitate. The use of seventeen stories and five celebrations provides the opportunity to repeat the ideas in many varied settings.

The first two units make up Year One of the program. They are intended to awaken and strengthen awareness of God's special love and friendship for each person. Both may be used as preparation for receiving Jesus in Holy Communion.

Although each of the experiences in Year I includes opportunities for response to God's love, Unit III, which is all of year Two, focuses especially on that response. The threefold message of each

of the twenty-four lessons and six celebrations is that the experience of God's love causes us to love in return, to want to be a friend and to be God-like, and to try to fulfill the command to love one another. Real-life situation stories in which friends show love for one another help the students to understand that because Jesus loves everybody and wants everybody to be very happy, we are good friends of Jesus when we love each other. This unit may be used as preparation for receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It stresses that we tell Jesus that we are sorry for not treating Him as our Friend, or for displeasing Him by hurting someone that He loves very much. It is important to prepare for this concept in the very first experience of Unit I, by emphasizing that God made and loves and is a friend to me *and* Julie *and* Brad, etc.

Each of these three units is comprised of five or six sessions followed by a celebration culminating and reviewing the specific thematic experiences. The sessions follow a pattern which provides six reinforcing approaches to the day's theme: readiness activity, presentation, singing, scripture reading, prayer, and a message spoken to each person individually. The rationale for a flexible, patterned experience is that the pattern with formal and informal activities meets individual needs by alternating quiet attention and movement. It also encourages personal and group interchange and provides for necesary reinforcement of the theme without routine repetition. (A single idea can be expressed in a number of various ways.) Another advantage of a patterned experience is that the day's routine tends to build security and tends to lessen disciplinary problems. (Most persons are more comfortable, relaxed and receptive in a familiar environment—one in which they know who will be there and what they will be doing.)

The readiness period provides an informal warm environment. It is the time for setting the tone of acceptance and caring—loving. Understanding of God's love will be learned more through the love experienced in the interchange between all the persons involved in the program (the community) than through the presentation. Students are welcomed at the door and are gradually involved in an art project with the group, or they may choose one of the stations suggested in the teacher's guide where various activities are ready for them (puzzles, clay, books, etc.).

Presentation time is brief, to the point and quiet. Preferably it takes place in a different part of the room. This allows for a little movement and prepares for a new mood—a formal one. The adults —volunteers and teachers—set the example of the new behavior that is expected at this time. The presentation is always accom-

panied by some visual aid, is concrete, is simple, and is related to the student's life situations. Analogies are avoided.

Immediately following the presentation is a singing period. The first song usually grows naturally out of the presentation theme and leads the group from a formal to another informal activity. It allows for a lighter participation and interaction with the group. This activity is much longer than the presentation, but takes place in the same part of the room.

The last three parts of each session take place in an atmosphere of quiet and reverence. It is suggested that another room be used if possible, otherwise a special corner of the same room can be prepared with candle, plant, etc. The movement to this "sacred spot" helps acclimate everyone to a mood that is different from the jovial singing period. The candle is lighted when everyone is settled down, and scripture is read—from a student handout or Bible. After a minute of silence (this will be a more comfortable minute after everyone becomes used to it) the prayer is begun. It can be spontaneous or prepared, but always includes time for all persons to express their feelings, petitions, etc. Visual aids used in the presentation and singing period may be used to encourage prayers connected with the day's particular concept. Immediately following the prayers, a message is given. This message may be given by a teacher, by a student who volunteers or is specially chosen, or it can be passed on from person to person. However it is given, each one is touched, called by name and given a message that is directly related to the experience of that day and elicits a personal response—not in word, but in everyday life. For example, "Joan," Jesus says, "Show love to all people," (Lesson 10, Unit III.)

The teacher guide, designed for volunteers, parents, and/or professional teachers, provides a master plan and individual lesson plans. A resource section includes craft activities, songs, prayers, scripture readings, messages, filmstrip references. Pupil handouts include a reading from scripture expressed in simple words. Students take home the handout which has a letter to parents on the back. This reinforces the message of the group lesson and encourages family involvement.

Gift is published by Winston Press, 430 Oak Grove, Minneapolis, Mn. 55403. It is possible to request single copies for a 30-day approval period.

Carol Podlasek, CSJ, *has worked with disabled people for fourteen years. She has served as a diocesan coordinator of religious education, and was instrumental in beginning two homes for disabled people.*

RELIGION LESSONS FOR GOD'S SPECIAL ONES

Catherine Geary Uhl

GOSPEL LESSON PLANS

Catherine Geary Uhl

After teaching several years and being unhappy with the limited number of texts available for developmentally disabled persons, I published my first text in 1971—*Religion Lessons for God's Special Ones*. The text introduces the student to the love of God, our Father, through stories, activities and psalms. Each lesson contains a letter to the parents to assist them in reinforcing the lesson at home throughout the week. Patterns for visual aids and crafts are included.

Once the students have received the sacraments, the texts available for further training in the love of God are limited. In 1979, Paulist Press published my second book, *Gospel Lesson Plans*.

Gospel Lesson Plans, as its title indicates, is a set of lesson plans based on the three cycles of Sunday Gospels. It is designed to assist the developmentally disabled person to take a more active and meaningful part in the Sunday liturgy.

Each lesson consists of: 1) a statement of its aim; 2) the Gospel story simplified, with possible new words for the student explained in parentheses; 3) an activity experience to reinforce the lesson; 4) the Responsorial Psalm worded as it appears in the Sunday Mass so the students will recognize it when they hear it at Mass; 5) a liturgy which is a practical application of the Gospel; 6) a letter to the parents to help them reinforce the lesson at home.

Supplies needed are listed at the beginning of each lesson. Patterns and instructions for their use follow the lesson.

Both books are geared to the students' learning abilities. Stories and Gospels are worded in such a way that students can comprehend them. Activities reinforce the lessons by involving several of the senses at a time.

While writing the books, I kept in mind the teacher on a limited budget and the teacher with limited artistic ability. Each lesson contains necesary patterns for visual aids and activities with detailed instructions on how to make and use each. Both texts are written so that the new teacher with little or no training can feel confident using either book. The lesson plans are so detailed that any teacher can have a successful class by carefully following each lesson plan.

If you are beginning a program and introducing your students to God, our Father, *Religion Lessons for God's Special Ones* is geared to your needs. (Order direct from the author: Catherine Geary Uhl, 2336 Rutgers Avenue, Long Beach, CA 90815. Price: $3 per copy plus shipping and handling.)

Gospel Lesson Plans is intended for use after your students have received the sacraments and are learning to become more active members of their parish. (Order from Paulist Press, 545 Island Road, Ramsey, NJ 07446. Price: $6.95 per copy plus shipping and handling.)

Catherine Geary Uhl *trains catechists for the Department of Pastoral Ministry with the Handicapped in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. She has taught special education classes for nearly thirty years.*

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Resources for Teachers and Parents

Helene McDonald, MHSH

GENERAL RESOURCES

All People Together. Roman Catholic Bishops of England and Wales. January, 1981.

Bissonier, Henri. *The Pedagogy of Resurrection,* translated by Carolyn Frederick. Paulist Press, 1979.

Break Down the Barriers. Australian Bishops.

Cronin, Rev. Lawrence J. *Resources for Religious Instruction of Retarded People.* (a 64-page bibliography of textbooks, magazines, newsletters. journals, films, filmstrips from Catholic, Jewish, Protestant and secular sources.) Order from: Rev. Lawrence J. Cronin, Office of Religious Education, 1 Lake Street, Brighton, MA 02191.

Document of the Holy See for the International Year of Disabled Persons. 1981. Available from the Special Education Department, NCEA.

Hall, Suzanne E., SNDdeN. "Catholic Education Becomes Special," *Momentum,* October, 1979.

Harrington, Mary Therese, SH. *Religious Education for the Mentally Retarded.* Paulist Press, 1973.
SPRED-Chicago. 1025 West Fry St., Chicago, IL 60622.

Haskett, Sheila, OSF. *Journey With Jesus.* Cardinal Stritch College Bookstore, 6801 North Yates Road, Milwaukee, WI 53217.

McDonald, Helene, MHSH. *Confirmation Lessons for Exceptional Children.* 19711 Hawthorne Street, Detroit, MI 48203.

Momentum, Journal of the National Catholic Educational Association, May, 1981. Theme of issue: "Responding to the needs of disabled persons."

National Catholic Office for the Deaf. 814 Thayer Ave., Silver Spring, MD 20901.

Barat College Lesson Plans. (Based on the Life of Christ.)
Twenty Primary Level Lessons, Sister Maura Costello
Twenty Intermediate Level Sessions, Sister Cathy Costello.

100 Lesson Plans for Teaching Religion to the Deaf. Twenty lesson plans for each of five age levels.

New York State Advisory Committee on Pastoral Ministry to the Handicapped. *Paraliturgies for All Seasons,* 1978. Order from Sr. Mary Adorata, CSSF, 1342 Lancaster Avenue, Syracuse, NY 13210.

O'Donnell, Brigid. *Catechesis for Persons with Disabilities: A Blueprint for Action.* Contact United States Catholic Conference, 1312 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

One in Christ Jesus—A Pastoral Statement about Handicapped Persons Among Us. Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops, 67 Bond Street, Suite 304, Toronto, Ontario, M5B 1X5, 1980.

Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on Handicapped People. November 16, 1978, United States Catholic Conference, 1312 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

Podlasek, Carol, CSJ. *Gift.* Winston Press, 430 Oak Grove, Minneapolis, MN 55403.

Russo, Anthony. *The God of the Deaf Adolescent.* Paulist Press, 1975.

Special Education Selections, American Bible Society, P.O. Box 4835, Dept. NDE, Grand Central Station, NY 10017.

Special to God, Special to Us. 35mm. slide program designed to help members of a parish congregation understand how to include the developmentally disabled person in liturgy and parish activities. Contact NAMRP, Trinity College, P.O. Box 4588, Washington, D.C. 20017.

Uhl, Catherine Geary. *Religion Lessons for God's Special Ones. Gospel Lesson Plans.* Paulist Press, 545 Island Road, Ramsey, N.J. 07446.

Vanier, Jean. *Eruption to Hope.* Paulist Press, 1971.
—*Be Not Afraid.* Paulist Press, 1975.
—*Community and Growth.* Paulist Press, 1979.
—"Rediscovering the Meaning of 'To Educate.' " *Momentum,* May, 1981.

Weber, Bernadette, OSF. Units on Natural Symbols; Water, Rock, Seed, Fire, and Light; Units on Hands and How Jesus Used His Hands; Lesson Plans Based on the Sunday Gospels—September through May. Write to Religious Education Center, 810 St. Germain Street, St. Cloud, MN 56301.

Wilke, Harold. *Creating the Caring Congregation.* Abingdon Press, Nashville, Tennessee, 1980.

Wolfensberger, Dr. Wolf. "Does Christianity Imply a Policy on Integration of Handicapped Children?" *Special Education Newsletter,* Vol. 1, No. 2; November, 1979.

SOME ARCHDIOCESAN OFFICES WITH CURRICULAR MATERIALS AVAILABLE

Diocese of Birmingham
Box 186
Birmingham, Alabama 35201

Archdiocesan Office of Education
155 East Superior Street
P.O. Box 1979
Chicago, IL 60690

Archdiocese of Cincinnati
100 E. Eighth Street
Cincinnati, OH 45202

Archdiocese of Detroit
305 Michigan Avenue
Detroit, MI 48226

Archdiocese of Dubuque
1229 Mt. Loretto Avenue
P.O. Box 1180
Dubuque, IA 52001

Archdiocese of Hartford
125 Market Street
Hartford, CT 06103

Diocese of Madison
Religious Education Center
142 W. Johnson Street
Madison, WI 53703

Diocese of San Diego
P.O. Box 11277
San Diego, CA 92111

Archdiocese of Santa Fe
Catholic Schools Office
4002 Silver Avenue, S.E.
Albuquerque, NM 87108

Archdiocese of Seattle
232 Warren Avenue, North
Seattle, WA 98109

Diocese of Syracuse
240 E. Onondaga Street
Syracuse, NY 13202

Archdiocese of Minneapolis/St. Paul
328 W. 6th Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55102

Diocese of St. Augustine
Gulf Life Tower
Suite 1648
Jacksonville, FL 32207

Diocese of St. Cloud
810 St. Germain Street
St. Cloud, MN 56301-3594

For a more complete listing of dioceses with curricular materials, consult *Catechesis for Persons with Disabilities: A Blueprint for Action*, by Brigid O'Donnell. United States Catholic Conference, 1312 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

ORGANIZATIONS

American Association on Mental Deficiency (AAMD), Religion Division. 5201 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20015.

National Apostolate with Mentally Retarded Persons (NAMRP), Trinity College, P.O. Box 4588, Washington, D.C. 20017.

National Catholic Educational Association, Special Education Department. 1077 30th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20007.

National Catholic Office for the Deaf, 814 Thayer Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20901.

PERIODICALS

The Exceptional Parent, P.O. Box 101, Back Bay Annex, Boston, MA 20117

NAMRP Journal, Trinity College, P.O. Box 4588, Washington, D.C. 20017

Special Education Newsletter, Special Education Department, National Catholic Educational Association, 1077 30th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20007. Available through membership in NCEA.

Helene McDonald *is a member of the Mission Helpers of the Sacred Heart. She is Supervisor of the Physically and Mentally Impaired in the Religious Education Office of the Archdiocese of Detroit.*

Christian community, by its very definition, implies inclusion, caring, support, and non-segregation. The context of our Church life—our parish life—is the obvious natural setting within which to witness true Christian community, i.e., caring and support for all *regardless of abilities, race, or socioeconomic status. Historically, we as Church have made strides in terms of integrating racial minorities; however, we have not made much progress in the effort to include disabled persons in all facets of our Church's life. We as Church cannot continue either to ignore or to segregate disabled persons.*

—excerpted from chapter one, Suzanne E. Hall, SNDdeN